

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.

TIME TO SPLIT?

The United Methodist
battle over same-sex
marriage

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Read **M. Craig Barnes** @
Faith Matters



“Pastors dare not allow the limited and weak body known as church to be their measure. For that, they can only turn back to the Christ they have ‘put on’ in their baptisms. This is what actually frees pastors to return to the congregations that have enough problems to assure them that they’ll never run out of work.”

(from The Pastor as Minor Poet)



Easter business

IT'S EASTER, and in many churches there will be crowds. Pews will be full to overflowing with worshipers, including many who attend church only once or twice a year. As a pastor I'd always greet them with something like, "If you only attend church once a year, this is the Sunday to be here. The music is powerful, the flowers are gorgeous, and everybody is dressed up and feeling good." There is more to it than that, of course. People come to church on Easter because they know that the subject is the oldest, deepest, most profound question in the human heart. Is there any reason to hope in the face of the inevitability of death? Is there any serious reason, in light of all the violence, suffering, and injustice in the world, to live with hope and resolve and confidence and joy?

A friend sent me a paragraph she wrote for her parish's Lenten devotional: "They all came. So do we. We come to be embraced in the dark hour. We come with regrets that once again we haven't begun to measure up. We come for faith in the future and acceptance of the past. We come, over and over, for a million different reasons, but we come, finally, to reassure ourselves that we're more than skin and bones."

People come to church on Easter because there is serious business on the agenda. They are not there to hear an explanation of how a dead body got up and walked out of the tomb. We may be tempted to try to explain, but it doesn't work. The

four biblical accounts are lean: each tells the story slightly differently and none provides a detailed account of the resurrection itself. It is almost as if they are telling us, like someone who warns us not to look directly at the bright sun, that we should not try to look too directly, that we should perceive this event in a different, deeper way—more heart than mind, more wonder than analysis. Some things are bigger than our ability to say them.

If you must have a little hard evidence, you can do worse than ponder how human beings were transformed: frightened disciples cowering behind a bolted door emerged from hiding as fearless and fierce followers who could not stop talking and singing about what had happened, even in the face of persecution, arrest, and their own martyrdoms. What changed cowards into brave disciples was the conviction that their crucified friend was alive. Because death did not defeat him, there was no reason to fear anything, not even death.

What transformed them was the same truth that raised up Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr. It is the same truth that raises up men and women to live with courage and commitment in the midst of illness, oppression, and, of course, the insult of our mortality—the Easter truth that love is stronger than hate and life is stronger than death. The battle has been won. Jesus Christ is risen!

THEN & NOW

edited by **Edward J. Blum**

"Then and Now" is a weekly online feature in which historians reflect on the lessons of the past and illumine the issues of the present.

Visit **christiancentury.org**

"Then and Now" features various writers, including **Edward J. Blum**, professor of history at San Diego State University. Blum recently wrote, with Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*.



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On the cover: Protesters for greater inclusivity in the United Methodist Church at the 2012 General Conference [© United Methodist News Service / Mike DuBose]

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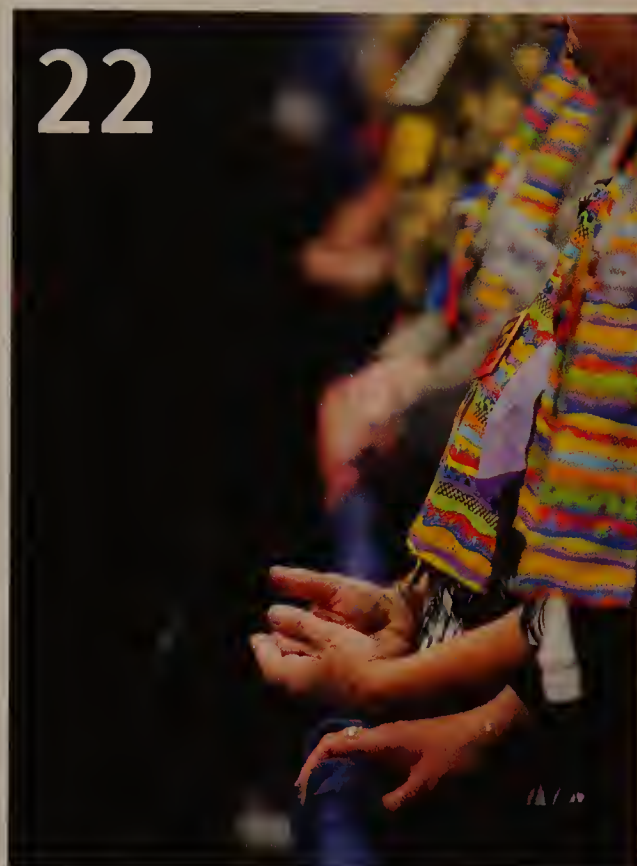
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Divided church

The March 19 cover story (“No longer strangers,” by Debra Bendis), with its opposing conservative and liberal viewpoints, made me think not only about how we are split into conservative and liberal camps, but how we still bear the questionable baggage of denominations. In the language of 1 Corinthians, we are churches of Apollos, churches of Cephas, churches of Paul. Is Christ divided? Are we holy? Are we catholic? Are we apostolic in mission?

*A. Karl Boehmke
Pullman, Wash.*

The question one should always ask is: What is the message and mission of the church according to the Bible? According to scripture, the church is the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, with a distinctive message. The mission of the church is to keep that message alive, current, and lived out in the world. A part of that message is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Upon accepting this sacrifice one is saved, redeemed from the penalty of sin.

If that message is lost while helping those in need, the church has ceased to be the church. What distinguishes it from any other organization is its proclamation of the gospel. What I found disturbing is that the article does not mention Jesus Christ or redemption of those who are lost.

*Anthony Bryant Sr.
christiancentury.org comment*

I doubt that the extreme right and the extreme left will ever talk with one another. But most of us in the pews are not extremists. We live next door to and work with people who do not share our religious and political positions. Nonetheless, we talk and exchange ideas, agree to disagree, support each other in difficult times, celebrate the good times, and cry together over losses.

Many churches have lopped off either the right or the left end of the pew. Perhaps the pulpit can learn from the middle of the pew.

*Bill Holmes
Louisville, Ky.*

The rest of the story . . .

Stephanie Paulsell’s “Journey stories” (March 19) was beautiful. I felt the ground tremble as I contemplated in a new way the power of story.

Yet I wish she would have addressed how the liminal space Jesus invites us into is permeated with the groaning and travailing of our fellow creatures. The compassionate journey story must include humans cooperating with God in the healing and liberating of all creation. Every flower, leaf, bird, star—everything—longs for completeness and wholeness. Any story that excludes others is not the whole story.

*Bob Muth
Kalispell, Mont.*

The shape of grief . . .

Like Julian Barnes, quoted by Richard Lischer (“Another grief observed,” March 5), I cringe when someone says that a person “has passed away.” My husband and two sons have died in the past several years. The words *died* and *dead* are so final, which is what death is for those of us left on earth. There is a great longing to have them back at first even though we know they are free of pain and at peace with their Savior, but then the realization comes that one must go on.

William James writes: “Much sorrow can be held within and nothing seems to have any shape or meaning until it is well past, then with determination (and

grace) can be left aside only to return in the night as piercing pain.”

*Ann Baker Riker
Wilbraham, Mass.*

Preaching politics . . .

I have been accused on more than one occasion of spending too much time in the pulpit on social justice issues (“Politics in the pulpit?” March 19). I was once dressed down for marring the church’s “good name” when arrested for protesting Alabama’s anti-immigrant laws.

It is our purpose to preach the Gospels and live into them. However, it is not our job to expect everyone to be in the same place we are. My world includes the immigrant, the Muslim, and the gay person. It is also my purpose and responsibility to introduce them to others in my congregation in hopes of expanding their world and experiences.

*Tommy Morgan
christiancentury.org comment*

Old and new . . .

Regarding Carol Howard Merritt’s “Boomer denominations” (March 5), I note that if a new fellowship wants to assure that it will thrive into another generation, some institutionalization has to occur. The thrill of the new fellowship is that there is little such baggage.

I have found that even core members of new fellowships eventually tired of the “ad hococracy” of the church and want a more settled existence. Bylaws, buildings, and traditions soon emerged. We recognized that there was a catalyst phase and then an organizing phase. Often the transition was painful.

*Stephen Gifford
christiancentury.org comment*

April 16, 2014

Whose religious freedom?

Last month the Supreme Court heard opening arguments in two cases pitting the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate against the religious objections of private business owners. The Christian owners of Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties object to the ACA's requirement that employee health-insurance plans cover emergency contraceptives, which they believe constitute abortion.

The court has a whole tangle of questions to consider: Are corporations people in every legal sense? Do for-profit entities have religious rights? If so, are they overruled by a compelling governmental interest in expanded contraception coverage? If these claims by a for-profit are upheld, could employers also lodge religious objections against coverage for blood transfusions or vaccinations or against various kinds of family leave?

The business owners are appealing to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, which aims to protect religious exercise from burdensome laws. A large bipartisan majority passed the RFRA, largely in response to a series of court decisions against free-exercise claims by adherents of Native American religions. It's a good law. And the fact that the RFRA's protections were aimed at minority faiths doesn't prevent them from applying to Christians as well.

But as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg pointed out in opening arguments, the RFRA wasn't designed to grant religious rights to corporations, and it wouldn't have passed if it had been. Conestoga and Hobby Lobby contend that the companies themselves, not just the owners, are religious entities with religious rights. But they are for-profit firms selling products of a not specifically religious nature. More important, these companies are not religious monoliths. The employees as well as the owners are part of the company, and these employees—some of whom have different religious beliefs from their bosses—have rights, too.

If paying for insurance coverage implicates an employer in an employee's health-care decisions, it does so in an abstract and distanced way. By contrast, the impact of coverage restrictions on employees is quite direct. The federal government has determined—rightly, in our view—that emergency contraceptives are a crucial part of comprehensive health insurance, a service which in the United States is provided primarily via employers. Why should female employees or dependents be denied this coverage based on a religious objection that is not their own, but someone else's?

As members of the majority faith, American Christians are more easily tempted than others to lose sight of the difference between exercising one's religious freedom and imposing one's beliefs on others. In this case, the owners of Hobby Lobby and Conestoga have overstretched the claim to religious liberty.

Employees shouldn't be denied coverage based on an employer's religious beliefs.

CENTURY marks

DELIGHTFUL: Krista Tippett, host of *On Being* on public radio, gave birth to a daughter while in seminary. The birth made her more aware of Jesus' teaching that adults should become like children. She came to realize that the kind of childlikeness Jesus recommends doesn't entail debasing oneself—it means living with a sense of curiosity, wonder, and delight. Tippett learned to see this kind of delight in other parts of scripture. The word *Eden*, for example, means delight (*Prism*, Winter).

TOUGH FUNERALS: Conducting funerals is one of the most important acts a pastor does. Inevitably, pastors have some tough funerals—after tragic acci-

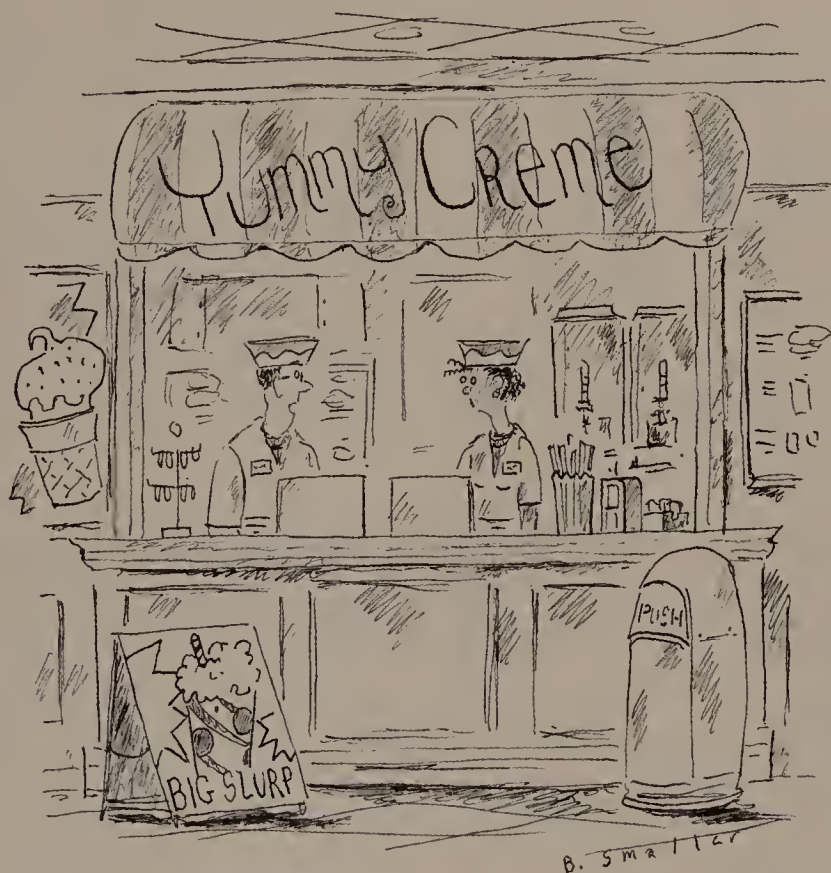
dents or premature deaths, or involving people with no faith or connection to the church. Michael Rogness, who has taught about funerals for over 20 years, makes these recommendations: carefully choose a fitting text for the sermon; try to articulate what the survivors are feeling, including their deep grief; don't make judgments about what God was or wasn't doing in the death of this person or about the deceased's eternal state. Most important, "Proclaim the gospel to the survivors. The heart of our faith is that because Jesus was raised, death is not the last word" (*Word & World*, Winter).

BACK TO EARTH: The Green Burial Council estimates that about one-fourth

of older Americans want a green burial. People who want eco-friendly endings have a number of choices, including being buried in nothing more than a shroud or being cremated and placed in a biodegradable urn. Nature's Casket, a company in Boulder, Colorado, sells pine coffins that can be recycled as bookshelves. Although green burials often cost less than conventional ones, they still represent a big business. By one estimate, there will be 50 percent more deaths in 2050 than in 2020 (*New York Times*, March 13).

VIRTUE OF EMPATHY: The novelist Ian McEwan wrote, "Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality." This is the rationale for the Empathy Library, an online resource that recommends fiction, non-fiction, and children's books, plus films that can help people empathize with the lives of others. It includes top ten lists on different themes such as love, war, or religion. Readers are invited to add their own suggestions and comments (empathylibrary.com).

WELCOMING TENT: Eshel, an Orthodox Jewish organization, was formed in 2010 to provide resources and community for Orthodox gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. One of their most important endeavors has been an annual retreat for parents of LGBT children. These retreats have helped repair the breach between parents and children. The parents often emerge from these retreats as advocates for LGBT people in the Orthodox community. *Eshel* refers to the biblical shrub with bright red flowers that Abraham



"I'm working part time, but I'm hoping that once I finish my master's they'll up my hours to full time."

planted to indicate to traveling strangers that a welcoming tent was close by (*Tablet*, March 14).

SYRIANS UNDER SIEGE: Thirteen nuns who were kidnapped from their monastery north of Damascus last December were released in March in an apparent exchange for prisoners held by the Assad regime. Despite this good news, Christians in Syria continue to be under siege. A jihadist group in the city of Raqqa gave local Christians an ultimatum: convert to Islam, pay a protection tax, or be killed. Although accurate numbers are hard to come by, one estimate says that 450,000 of the 2 million Syrian refugees are Christians. Syrian Christians who have fled their war-torn country report kidnappings, murders, ransacking of their shops, and pressure to convert (*Christian Science Monitor*, March 10).

DRAFT DODGERS: About 50 Israeli youth have signed a letter sent to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying they refuse to serve in the Israel Defense Forces. The letter cites the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories as the reason for their resistance. The group also referred to human rights violations in the West Bank. "Any military service perpetuates the current situation, and therefore we cannot take part in a system that carries out these deeds," the letter said (*Haaretz*, March 9).

WATTS'S WIT: Isaac Watts (1674–1748), known as the father of English hymnody, was a child prodigy. He studied Latin at age four, Greek at nine, French at eleven, and Hebrew at 13. As a child he loved making rhymes. When he was caught with his eyes open during family devotions, he responded: "A little mouse for want of stairs / ran up a rope to say its prayers." Punished for this by his father, the young Watts replied: "Oh, father, do some pity take, / And I will no more verses make." Watts wrote about 750 hymns in his lifetime, including "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "Joy to the World," and "My Shepherd Will Supply My Need" (*28 Hymns to Sing Before You Die* by John M. Mulder and F. Morgan Roberts, Cascade Books).

“Evangelicals are leaving the church because they are angry. Roman Catholics are leaving because they feel betrayed. And mainline Christians? They’re leaving because they’re bored.”

— John Longhurst, commenting on findings from research by Elizabeth Drescher on why people are leaving the church (*Winnipeg Free Press*, March 22)

“When you’re Christian in Iran, you can’t speak. You have to keep quiet and not talk about the truth that you know and that you believe in.”

— Mori (who did not give his last name in order to protect his identity) escaped being imprisoned in Iran (*New York Times*, March 14).

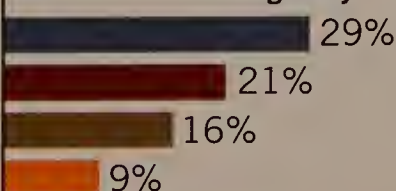
RECTORS OF ROCK: Four priests from the Milwaukee Episcopal Diocese have formed a band they refer to variously as the Rectors of Rock, Fathers of Funk, and the Collar Studs. They perform for various causes throughout the diocese with a repertoire of classic rock, blues, and country music. The band’s music “lets people see us in a different way,” one of them says. “And maybe that opens up doors for people who wouldn’t talk to us otherwise” (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, February 25).

A BLESSING: When the late Brenning Manning was ordained a priest, his spiritual director, Larry Hine, offered Manning this blessing (quoted in *Fail* by J. R. Briggs, IVP):
May all of your expectations be frustrated,
May all of your plans be thwarted,
May all of your desires be withered into nothingness,
That you may experience the powerlessness and poverty of a child and can sing and dance in the love of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

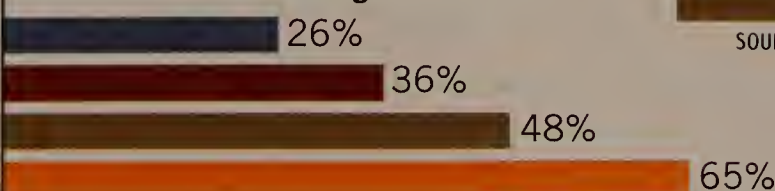
Percent who consider themselves political independents



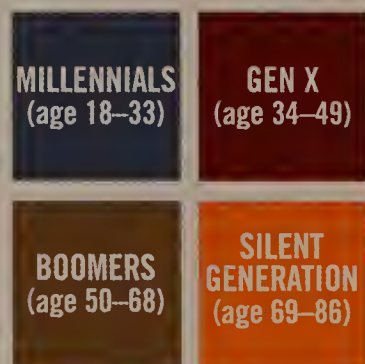
Percent who are religiously unaffiliated



Percent married between ages 18 and 32



DECLINE OF INSTITUTIONS?



SOURCE: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Wilderness venture

by Teri McDowell Ott

A FEW YEARS AGO, as a young Presbyterian minister, I started to get a lot of affirmation for my preaching. People were listening, worship attendance was growing, and I was overhearing parishioners describe me as a good preacher. Soon this shaped my pastoral identity and led me to claim preaching as my “thing.”

This prompted me to attend a large preaching conference, to learn from the best in my field. Getting lost in a massive sanctuary full of preachers was paradise for an introvert like me. I relished the anonymity—while also envying the preaching “great” in the pulpit. I wonder if I might ever be invited to be up there, I thought to myself but told no one.

In fact, the only time I interacted with others was when the preacher forced me to. After a few of these “turn to your neighbor” conversations, I found a new pew: a single seat in the far stratosphere of the balcony, where no one was my neighbor.

Even from this isolated perch, I heard sermons that brought tears to my eyes. I took a lot of notes, and I left feeling inspired. But something was missing. It was so easy to hide there, to escape any real challenge. I attended the conference again the following year, but the problem remained. I came home with better ideas, but not a better preacher.

When I moved to Illinois for a new job as a college chaplain, my academic schedule prevented me from attending that conference again. Instead, I signed up for a couple of classes at the nearby Iowa Summer Writer’s Festival. I’d always loved to write. Maybe I’d even find a way to publish my sermons!

In Iowa City, I was a lone M.Div. in a sea of MFAs. I took two classes, one on

free writing and one on “nonfiction for people with short attention spans.” I didn’t write sermons, but I did write about my faith. Others wrote about their childhoods, parenting, or the pain of death or divorce. We got to know each other intimately—especially since one of the unspoken rules was to check your ego at the door.

The first time I read my writing to the class, I reverted to my 13-year-old self. I giggled manically, smiled inappropriate-

found a home in Buddhism as an adult. When we sat down for our individual teaching session at a local coffee shop, I felt like I was meeting with my own edgy Buddha.

He began our conversation by confessing his envy. “You know, Teri, poets get really excited when ten people show up for one of our readings,” he said. “You have an audience larger than that every week.” Then, in a bit of a fury, he pro-

When my sermon is going nowhere,
when I have nothing new to say, I ask
myself what I am avoiding and why.

ly, and sweated profusely. What I had written was terrible—stiff awkward sentences, filled with words like *nice*—yet I had to read it aloud and receive feedback.

After I finished, the teacher shared some advice: “If you find yourself writing bad stuff, try to write even worse.” Was I supposed to take that as encouragement?

By Wednesday I was in crisis. “I suck at this,” I texted to a pastor friend. “This is the hardest thing I have ever done.” I knew I was failing miserably. Everything I wrote was composed in fear, written to the expectations I assumed for myself as a pastor. I wrote stiff and safe.

My classmates responded with polite words, straining to encourage me. My teacher was ruthless. He was a brilliant poet; insightful, witty, extremely well read, and interested in religion—he’d grown up Jewish in New York City but

ceeded to rip apart the carefully crafted sermon that lay on the table in front of him—a sermon that I had shared as one of my best. His pen blocked off and slashed through whole paragraphs as “unnecessary.” He circled my “real beginning,” which I had mistakenly placed at the end.

Finally, in a frustrated huff, he just stopped, looked up at me, and said, “You’re not venturing far enough into the wilderness of humanity. You tiptoe in, but you don’t go far enough. Then you slap a Band-Aid on the end for a conclusion as if to make everything OK.” I sat there silently, not knowing what to say. I understood, but I didn’t. I knew I had work to do as a preacher.

My teacher’s words haunted me: you’re not venturing far enough into the wilderness. I began to search for models of wilderness writing. Everyone in Iowa City was drunk on poetry, so I started there. I already had works by Mary Oliver and

Wendell Berry on my bookshelf; every pastor knows to quote those two. Upon the recommendation of my new literary friends, I began to read Douglas Goetsch, Marie Howe, Stephen Dunn, Mark Halliday, and Russell Edson. I discovered Christine Hemp and David Wright and rediscovered Sharon Olds. I stacked my arms with slim volumes and immersed myself not only in poetry, but in people—because as I read, I came to know these poets in deeply personal ways.

In fact, they stunned me with the ways they lay themselves bare on the page. When I read about their lives, I felt life. Never overly sentimental, never cliché, their sparse details and specificity lured me into their wilderness and their truth. Yet that wilderness is also a universal place, a human place. Marie Howe takes me there at the end of her poem “One of the Last Days”:

On one of the last days I told him, You
know how much you love Joe?
That’s how much I love you. And he
said, No. And I said, Yes.

And he said, No. And I said, You
know it’s true.
And he closed his eyes for a minute.

When he opened them he said, Maybe
you’d better start looking for
somebody else.

As I read poems like these—poems that evoke such deep, universal emotions—something started to happen within me. A desire began to grow and gain strength: a desire to be more honest and free.

I started to write again—at first playfully, then with abandon. I wrote angry. I wrote questioning. I wrote silly. I swore a lot. I had no agenda for my writing, except to stop hiding and to follow the thread of inspiration—a thread that led me to stories and scenes and experiences of truth that didn’t exist until I intentionally gave myself the space and permission to go there.

It was liberating to write this way. It was also effective. My teacher finally

smiled at me and said my words held wisdom. My classmates told me that if I wrote sermons like that, they’d come hear me preach.

I began to understand what people—myself included—are hungry to hear. Our hunger is for words that are real and honest, that evoke our deepest emotions, that name the wilderness in which we live and enlighten us to the truth that we are not alone there. My experience in Iowa helped me understand the importance of this wilderness. It also emboldened me to venture farther into it.

In other words, when I’m writing a sermon, I now pay more attention to myself. As I approach some piece of truth, I may feel myself growing anxious. I can’t tell this church’s members they are boring and lifeless, I tell myself, even though they are dying from their lack of vitality. I can’t leave Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac unjustified, even though I’ve never been able to justify this story in my own mind. I can’t use the word *ass* in my prose

poem, even though it’s the word that comes most naturally. When this anxiety comes, I’ve started willing myself forward anyway, so as not to lose the thread.

There’s a young man in my community, an evangelical whose face registers shock every time I preach. I’ve often felt compelled to present myself to him in a way that’s inauthentic. Now, I acknowledge his haunting presence and then move on. I can always edit later, I tell myself.

When my sermon is going nowhere, when I have nothing new to say, I ask myself what I am avoiding and why. I search for the heat of the scriptural text, the place where it rubs my heart into sparks of connection, the place of its most profound and frightening truth. Then I fan the flames to see where the Spirit takes me.

It’s a wild and frightening ride, this venture into the wilderness. But in this place of stark honesty, I am being led to my best self and my best preaching. I am being led to love my congregation—and the world—with words that matter. **CC**

Haircuts & tacos

That’s what the sign says
on the storefront in Bullhead City
along the steaming Colorado.

Which would you want first?
Either way, you’ll be tasting
split ends in your refried beans.

But think about the time saved,
about all the things we might
combine: Gas & Perm,

Laundromat & Five-Stud Poker
(Hold ’em & Fold ’em),
Freshman Comp & Foot Massage.

Efficiency. Eclecticism.
These are signs of democracy,
the little engines that make us

mix our metaphors, Free Wi-Fi
While U Wait in the green room,
the jury box, the wedding chapel.

Paul Willis

Teri McDowell Ott is chaplain at Monmouth College in Illinois.

Ways to be Lutheran

by Mark Granquist

AMERICAN Lutherans became a full part of American Protestantism just in time to participate in its decline. From its high of more than 9 million members in 1965, the total number of American Lutherans declined to just over 7 million in 2013, representing about 2 percent of the American population. Though Lutheran numbers generally plateaued through the 1970s and 1980s, both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod have declined markedly over the past 25 years. The ELCA went from 5.2 million members in 1988 to 3.9 million in 2013; the LCMS declined less severely, from 2.7 million members in 1988 to 2.3 million in 2013. The decline in giving to the national programs and offices of these two denominations is also fairly dramatic, though more pronounced in the ELCA.

Besides suffering from the same negative demographic trends facing other mainline Protestant denominations in this period—aging membership and an inability to retain younger members—the ELCA since 2000 has witnessed the departure of nearly 500,000 members who have coalesced into two new and distinct centrist Lutheran denominations: the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (2001) and the North American Lutheran Church (2010). Though the scale of these departures is noteworthy in itself, this development is all the more interesting for the new patterns and new directions that these denominations are attempting to develop. Their rejection of the ELCA (and implicitly the LCMS) has forced them to experiment with new ways of being Lutheran Christians in the American context,

and they are actively exploring these possibilities.

The older and larger of these two new denominations is the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ, which had its beginnings in 2001 and now numbers more than 350,000 members in over 700 congregations in the United States. This group has its roots in the Lutherans who were troubled by the ecumenical agreement between the ELCA and the Episcopal Church in 1999, “Called to Common Mission.” Already disaffected

port of a denominational body in times of need. Weaning pastors and congregations from this pattern and encouraging them to take their own responsibility has proven to be challenging. The leadership of the LCMC has been adamant about (sometimes even fixated on) not becoming just another Lutheran denomination, but rather continuing this experiment.

The congregations within the LCMC are not unified by a single theology or form of Lutheran practice, and many of them were already anomalies within the

Two Lutheran bodies are exploring new—and old—ways of being a denomination.

within the ELCA, these Lutheran dissidents resisted the adoption of the agreement because they believed that it took the ELCA further in a centralized and clericalized direction. Losing this fight was the proverbial “last straw” for them, and many began the difficult and complicated process of formally leaving the ELCA.

As its name suggests, the Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ is a Lutheran experiment in congregational polity, historically something that Lutherans have rarely attempted to implement. The LCMC vests power solely in the local congregations and understands itself as advisory to them. This is more than problematic for many American Lutherans, who, though they often complain about “synod,” have come to rely on the sup-

ELCA before they departed. There are a number of different wings or emphases within the LCMC—congregations whose ethos tends toward evangelical, charismatic, or low-church pietist expressions of Lutheranism—so the annual gatherings of the LCMC tend to be rather eclectic. This is mostly celebrated, but can cause frictions. Within the LCMC congregations are allowed (but not required) to join various Mission Districts; some of these groups represent geographical regions (as has been common in Lutheranism), but others are affiliation groups of congregations that share a common ethos, such as those listed above. An interesting example of such an affiliation grouping is one found in the upper Midwest, the Augustana District, which represents a creative move back toward some elements of the more typical synodical structure of

mutual accountability between congregations. Though some others in the LCMC grumble about “creeping synodicalism,” the ethos of the LCMC itself allows congregations and districts their own autonomy, even to explore such directions.

The second new denomination, the North American Lutheran Church, was formed after the 2009 decision by the ELCA to allow the ordination of noncelibate homosexual pastors. Formally organized in 2010, this denomination has grown in just a few years to represent more than 125,000 members and 335 congregations in the United States and Canada. Although these dissident congregations could have joined the LCMC, those who eventually formed the NALC did not appreciate the congregational polity of the LCMC and sought to replicate a more traditional American Lutheran synodical polity. The NALC is strongest in the belt of Lutherans that runs from Pennsylvania through the lower Middle West to Iowa, down the East Coast to the Carolinas, and in Texas. Like the LCMC, the NALC has its own internal groupings, including a sizable number of Evangelical Catholic Lutherans with a liturgical and high-church orientation.


On its surface the NALC does not look like much of a radical departure from the ELCA; indeed, some of its critics call it “the ELCA without gays.” But this misses the point of the NALC itself, which seems actually to be a reappropriation of older American Lutheran patterns that had been wiped out in the waves of merger that led to the ELCA. A number of its innovations seem minor, but in reality are reversing 20th-century trends. The NALC has a different leadership pattern, with a single bishop in charge of the spiritual and pastoral aspects of the denomination, while a general secretary handles the day-to-day administration. Traditionally synodical in its polity, the NALC nevertheless revives an older Lutheran tradition wherein major decisions for the denomination are subject to congregational ratification

(something the ELCA abandoned in its 1988 formation).

Both of these new Lutheran denominations face similar problems. They certainly face the potential of internal factionalism and external isolation. Both were born out of prolonged and difficult schism, and many of their congregations and pastors bear traumatic scars from taking leave of the ELCA. This makes internal bonds of trust more difficult to achieve, and critical points within the history of these two groups have been colored by such stress. They have grown, but mainly by drawing congregations and members out of the ELCA, which is not a long-term strategy for growth. It is difficult to determine whether the congregations of either denomination are successful in reaching the unchurched. Both denominations are underrepresented in growing suburban and exurban areas of the country. Only time will tell if these two new denominations will be able to embody this ethos of evangelism and outreach that they know they must achieve.

Nevertheless, these two denominations are interesting experiments in how American Protestantism might reinvent itself for the challenges of the 21st century. The two groups have structured themselves, almost instinctively, by drawing from successful historical patterns in

American Lutheranism. What seems most striking about both of them is that they have been able to engender in their pastors and lay leaders a sense of identity, spirit, and common mission. They have flattened and minimized levels of structure and administration, decentralized authority, empowered their members, and allowed for experimentation and change. These changes seem to have developed a level of trust and identity within the denominations that has allowed them to move forward.

It is hardly fair to compare the experiences of large, established denominations such as the ELCA or the LCMS with those of much smaller, start-up denominations. Like many other older American Protestant denominations, the ELCA and LCMS have already undergone extensive changes in the past 20 years. But these changes have been, for the most part, incremental and involuntary—hundreds of small, reactive reductions that have attempted to “stop the bleeding” without really addressing the underlying problems. These reactive strategies are of limited use, and to suggest that such decline is inevitable is unacceptable. Imaginative reinvention of the kind undertaken by the LCMC and NALC could be the key to a better future for the ELCA and LCMS and might, in the long run, be well worth the struggle. 

Shadow and light

Sometimes to the eye, the green shadow of the vine
has more substance than the vine itself, its leaves
fluttering, translucent awnings in the mind.

Tall morning shadows of children exaggerate
the future everywhere. Saints and reprobates alike
cast shadows in the harsh light of the real.

And memory is full of shadows, borrowing light
from contemplation to discern the faces and forms
of all who have slipped away from our embrace.

If in that last darkness there is light, jasper walls
will test our final substance. Perhaps the dead will
know us first by tracing the shadows that we cast.

Mark Granquist teaches at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Linda Mills Woolsey

Alban Institute closes

One of the main institutions providing continuing education and advice to mainline Protestant leaders has announced that it will shut its doors.

Since it was founded four decades ago, the Alban Institute has assisted mostly mainline congregations through its consulting and publishing programs. Founder and former president Loren Mead became well known for his speaking and writing about the future of U.S. denominations and was one of the first to predict denominational decline.

"When I started as a parish pastor, I found there wasn't much help or continuing education," said Mead, a retired Episcopal priest. "I am glad I have been able to contribute to the church, but I have not been able to solve its turnaround."

Many mainline churches looked to Alban, based in Virginia, to provide literature and consultants on everything from finding a new pastor to strategies for growth and financial health.

But as more publishers and consultants got into the business that Alban pioneered, the institution found it difficult to maintain its niche. Like other nonprofits, it also lost revenue during the recent recession.

"The Alban Institute went through the great recession just like everyone else," said James P. Wind, who retired as president of Alban earlier this year. "The market got tougher to thrive in."

Total assets from the institute fell from \$5.1 million in 2010 to \$3.2 million in 2012, according to its most recent financial disclosure forms.

Alban is in talks with Duke Divinity School about assuming the remaining assets, estimated between \$300,000 to \$500,000, with the possible creation of an "Alban Endowment Fund." Duke will also acquire Alban's intellectual property and mailing lists.

A letter from the chairman of Alban's board, Case Hoogendoorn, said the changes will allow Alban's mission to continue, "albeit in a different form."

Wind earned in 2011 a salary of \$276,243, according to Hoogendoorn. The same year, Alban's director of institutional advancement received a salary of \$155,214, and its chief financial officer received a salary of \$152,540. Hoogendoorn said the board compared Wind's salary to that of seminary leaders in the Washington area.

Wind's compensation package, including a housing allowance, was appropriate, Hoogendoorn said, because he was also involved in overseeing the Center for Congregations in Indianapolis, an Alban program which in 2003 became a separate nonprofit organization controlled by the institute in Virginia.

Alban Institute and the ICC combined had 40 employees in 2002 but that dropped to 24 the next year due to layoffs and attrition. Departures in 2011 and 2013 brought the staff average down to 12. The board cut Wind's salary by 10 percent at one point. Six employees remained when the organization shut down.

[Hoogendoorn, in an interview with the CENTURY, said, "The programs which most supported Alban were always consulting, education, and publishing. What really changed in 2010 and 2011 was not only the business model itself but also that the consulting, education, and publishing became too costly to support."

[With Wind's recent retirement and a downsized staff, Hoogendoorn said, Alban's customary programs were unlikely to secure the Lilly Endowment's further support. "We told consultants that they would have to be self-supporting, and we decided to sell off our publishing assets," he said.]

Alban's publishing program has been

acquired by the Rowman & Littlefield publishing house, which will continue to publish books with the Alban imprint. The books will continue to focus on church governance, leadership, and development, with editorial oversight from Duke.

The purchase includes about 270 active titles from authors such as Diana Butler Bass, Peter L. Steinke, and Roy M. Oswald. The publisher's CEO told *Publishers Weekly* it will produce 25 to 30 books a year alongside its other religious imprints.

"The Alban Institute is a huge symbol of continuing education and refreshment for me," said Ed Bacon, the rector of the 4,000-member All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California. "It was bringing in the very best practices of organizational development and applying them to church organizations."

Alban was sustained largely by money from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment, as well as its consulting and education services. But ultimately, it wasn't a sustainable model, said Kirk Hadaway, research director for the Episcopal Church.

"They weren't driven by profit in the same way that other parachurch organizations could tend to be," Hadaway said. "The lack of profit motivation may have been a problem in their long-term survival."

As the finances of mainline Protestant congregations have been deteriorating, it's no surprise that an organization such as Alban would close, said David Roozen, director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, who studies organizational change.

"I wasn't aware that they were this close to closing, but on another level, it doesn't surprise me that they've been feeling some real stress," Roozen said.

The Center for Congregations, which was launched under the Alban Institute name, will continue as a stand-alone ven-

ture. Some of Alban's consultants will continue independently, while eight others work together under the "Congregational Consulting" umbrella. —RNS/added sources

After tumult, World Vision reverses decision to hire staff in same-sex unions

Christian relief organization World Vision has reversed its decision after announcing that it would no longer define marriage only as between a man and a woman in its employee conduct manual.

On March 24 the organization's U.S. branch, based in Washington State, had said that it would recognize same-sex marriage as being within the norms of "abstinence before marriage and fidelity in marriage" cited in the conduct code for its 1,100 employees.

World Vision's U.S. president Rich Stearns said, in a letter to workers, "I want to be clear that we have not endorsed same-sex marriage, but we have chosen to defer to the authority of local churches on this issue." World Vision has employees who attend churches that conduct same-sex marriages, including the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, among others.

And in an interview with *Christianity Today* before what appeared to be a groundbreaking change for an evangelical body, Stearns said that World Vision's board was "overwhelmingly in favor" of the change.

But the step immediately drew heavy criticism from conservative Christians. After the initial announcement, the Assemblies of God urged its members to consider dropping support.

Ryan Reed tweeted on March 26, "My wife works for WV. In today's staff meeting Stearns announced that so far 2,000 kids [were] dropped." World Vision's child sponsorships are \$35 a month, which means the organization could have lost at least \$840,000 in revenue over the next year.

Nearly \$567 million of World Vision's \$1 billion budget comes from private contributions, according to the 2012 annual report.

"We've listened to supporters who were concerned about the conduct change in policy," Stearns told a reporter. "We believe we made a mistake. We're asking them to forgive and understand our poor judgment in the original decision."

The board reverted to its long-standing policy. "World Vision has always been a Christian organization since its founding in 1950," said Stearns. He said supporters pointed out that the changed stance was not consistent with what the Bible says about marriage.

"The last couple of days have been painful," he said. "We especially feel pain for confusion that we caused. What we found was we created more division instead of more unity, and that was not the intent of the board or myself."

Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptists' Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, quickly took aim at

the new policy. "At stake is the gospel of Jesus Christ," wrote Moore.

"If sexual activity outside of a biblical definition of marriage is morally neutral, then, yes, we should avoid making an issue of it," he wrote. "If, though, what the Bible clearly teaches and what the church has held for 2,000 years is true, then refusing to call for repentance is unspeakably cruel and, in fact, devilish."

Retired megachurch pastor John Piper called the first decision tragic. "I pray they will repent and turn back to their more faithful roots," he wrote.

Billy Graham's son Franklin Graham, president of the relief organization Samaritan's Purse, said the new policy is "ungodly" when he was interviewed on Family Research Council's radio program. He suggested that the organization might eventually approve of polygamous relationships.

"It's obvious World Vision doesn't believe in the Bible," Graham said, adding, "I am sickened over it." —Sarah Pulliam Bailey, RNS



PHELPS'S TRADEMARK: Fred Phelps, 84, founder of Westboro Baptist Church and media master of hate speech campaigns, died March 20 after devoting decades to damning Americans for tolerating homosexuality. "God Hates Fags" was the Westboro code, displayed on signs toted around the country. Whenever there was a newsworthy death—be it Matthew Shepard, the gay teen murdered in 1998, or a soldier killed in action, a movie star, or an innocent child victim in a mass murder—Westboro would be there. Typical of its appearances was one at the University of Missouri athletic camp on February 15. Shirley Phelps-Roper (shown here) protested after Michael Sam, an All-American defensive lineman for Missouri and a possible NFL athlete, announced that he was gay.

Multisite church model still vital, study shows

The vast majority of multisite churches are growing, according to a new study, and they are seeing more involvement from laypeople and newcomers after they open an additional location.

Nearly one in ten U.S. Protestants attends a congregation with multiple campuses, according to findings released March 11 in the “Leadership Network/Generis Multisite Church Scorecard.”

The report cites new data from the National Congregations Study, which found there were 8,000 multisite churches in the United States in 2012—up from 5,000 in 2010—including churches with more than one gathering on the same campus. Churches that have created additional worship space in a separate setting now exist in almost every state, several Canadian provinces, and dozens of other countries.

Multisite churches typically operate with a main campus headed by the senior minister and one or more satellite locations. In some settings, attendees at the satellite location watch the same sermon, which is beamed in from the central location, but have their own dedicated on-site pastor, music, or small group meetings.

The scorecard examined 535 responses to a survey of multisite churches that had created worship space in a separate setting. Among the findings:

- By the end of 2013, the average church has grown 14 percent since it went multisite.
- The vast majority (88 percent) report increased lay participation after having multiple locations.
- It's still a relatively new phenomenon: 60 percent had opted for the multisite model in the past five years.
- Almost half (47 percent) have a location in a rural area or a small town.
- One in three (37 percent) started being multisite through a merger of different congregations.

Although megachurches (congregations with 2,000 or more weekly attendees) were pioneers of the multisite con-

cept, churches with as few as 50 people and as many as 15,000 have tried this approach, said Warren Bird, director of research at Leadership Network, a Dallas-based church think tank.

Multisite is also an international phenomenon: one-third of the congregations on Bird's list of international megachurches are multisite.

The report points out some of the challenges of juggling more than one campus for worship. Researchers found in 2010 that one in ten multisite churches they surveyed had closed a location.

In this new survey, some said rented space in public schools—a popular option for multisite churches—is “one of the toughest places to launch” an additional site.

“I can only guess that the climate of churches renting public facilities is getting more and more difficult with the number of school boards that are declining to rent either on Sundays or to religious groups on the increase,” Bird said.

Jim Sheppard, CEO of Generis, an Atlanta-based consulting firm that sponsored the report, warned that it is important to have a “good, sound contract” in whatever location a church picks to set up a temporary worship space.

“If your initial location is a public school, don't overestimate the relationship,” he wrote. “People can change, politics can get involved, and you might be forced out sooner than expected.”

Multisite church leaders report that they are finding a greater percentage of “unchurched” people in their new locations than at the original location. “Historically, a church's greatest impact on the community is in its early years, and so the same thing is happening with a new campus,” Bird said.

Both independent congregations and those affiliated with denominations are embracing the multisite concept. Some regional denominational groups, including the United Methodists, consider mergers and other multisite options as part of their revitalization strategies.

“One of them is vibrant but needs facilities,” Sheppard said of some merging congregations in a webinar about the report. “The other one lacks vibrancy but has facilities.” —Adelle M. Banks, RNS

D.C.'s 'ugliest church' meets wrecking ball

So long, ugly church. Very few people will miss you.

After years of protracted legal battles, a small band of Christian Scientists within a stone's throw of the White House have something to cheer about: the church they called home for nearly 40 years, often mistaken for a bunker, will soon be no more.

Members of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist, have tried for years to tear down their windowless building, built in 1971 at the height of “brutalist” architecture. In Washington, as in most cities, there's not much appetite for brutalism anymore.

Except, that is, among some preservationists who in 1991 applied for historic landmark status for the building without the church's knowledge.

Church members said the brown concrete walls, lack of windows, and a front door that wasn't visible from the street all worked against the congregation of 50 to 60 members. A treeless, windswept plaza didn't help either. Inside the darkened sanctuary scaffolding had to be erected just to change the lightbulbs.

Moreover, the small congregation had visions of transforming the site two blocks from the White House into an office building with a new space for the church—a financial windfall that could help sustain the church's operations for years to come.

After the city granted landmark status in 2007, over the church's objections, the church filed suit. Legal scholars and developers followed the case closely after it raised an important question: If the owners want to tear down a building, can somebody else force them to keep it?

For the church, it was a fundamental question of religious freedom because the church said the old building actually detracted from its mission, sapped precious resources, and contributed little to the community.

In 2010, a settlement was reached between the church, city government, preservationists, and development partners. The landmark status was revoked

and a demolition permit was granted. The design concept was approved in 2012.

Mark Mathiesen, a member of the congregation and the project manager for the new church building's construction, said the demolition and new construction mark an exciting time in the church's history.

"In many respects, it was the opposite of the old church," Mathiesen said of the new building's design. "We talked with the architects about transparency, light, and openness to the community."

The new building will boast top-to-bottom windows, with 130,000 square feet of offices and 10,000 square feet reserved for the church and a Christian Science Reading Room. Street-level retail and underground parking are also planned for the site.

"We've wanted to develop the site since 1985, and we've had a lot of twists and turns over the years," Mathiesen said.

For now, the congregation is holding Sunday services across town on Capitol Hill, while its mid-week testimonial meetings are held in a Christian Science Reading Room near the old site. The project is expected to be finished by 2016.

Members are pretty sure they'd have the blessing of the church's original architect, Araldo Cossutta. "My work should not be fossilized," he once said, "but when you replace it, make sure the replacement is an even greater gift." —Amanda Murphy, RNS



RNS / AMANDA MURPHY

TORN DOWN: After years of legal battles, the Third Church of Christ, Scientist, in Washington, D.C., is being demolished.

Religious nones may not be who you think they are

IN RECENT SURVEYS, the religious nones—as in “none of the above”—appear to lead in the faith marketplace. In fact, none could soon be the dominant label that U.S. adults pick when asked to describe their religious identity.

But they may not be who you think they are. Today, nones include many more unbranded believers than atheists, and they show an increasingly diverse racial and ethnic mix.

Researchers say this is already making nones' attitudes and opinions less predictably liberal on social issues.

A survey of Americans by the Public Religion Research Institute found 21 percent are “unaffiliated” (PRRI's umbrella term for a diverse group including atheists, seculars, and people who say they still believe in God); 20 percent are Catholic; and 19 percent are white evangelical.

“Nones are dancing on the razor's edge of leading,” said Robert P. Jones, CEO of PRRI.

Meanwhile, the Pew Research

Center's cumulative findings, based on 16,000 interviews in numerous 2013 surveys, found a slightly different split: 22 percent Catholic; 20 percent nones (a mix of people who say they believe “nothing in particular,” unaffiliated believers, and unbelievers); and 18 percent white evangelicals.

However, both Jones and Greg Smith, director of U.S. religion surveys for Pew, caution that this is really a statistical three-way tie for both research firms once the critical margin of error for each survey is considered.

Meanwhile, all the subcategories of Protestants—white and black evangelicals, plus the mainline faithful—still add up to a plurality (48 percent), although each has “distinctive social and political beliefs, attitudes, and opinions,” said Smith.

“The nones are clearly growing as a share of the population. It's a big, important, fundamental change in U.S. society, regardless of what's causing it and whatever else is happening,” Smith said. “But does it necessarily mean that other religious groups are less healthy than they

might have been? It may be that they are, but there are other forces that are in play.”

Those forces include immigration rates and religious switching. About half of Americans switch their religion, leave one, or find one at least once in their lifetime.

Today's young adults are starting out more unaffiliated than any prior generation. So even if some millennials do find a faith, Jones said, “they will still be the most unaffiliated generation in history.”

Jones identified another force in shifting religious demography: “There are fewer white evangelicals among millennials [age 18 to 33] because younger Americans today are more racially and ethnically diverse.”

A PRRI survey found that second- and third-generation Hispanics are less likely to be Catholic than their parents or grandparents. Some move to evangelical, charismatic, and politically conservative Protestant groups, but equal numbers are simply becoming unaffiliated, said Jones. —Cathy Lynn Grossman, RNS

Franklin Graham says Putin better on gay issues than Obama

Evangelist Franklin Graham is praising Russian president Vladimir Putin for his aggressive crackdown on homosexuality, saying his record on protecting children from gay “propaganda” is better than President Obama’s “shameful” embrace of gay rights.

Graham, who now heads the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association started by his famous father, praises Putin in the March issue of the association’s *Decision* magazine for signing a bill that imposes fines for adults who promote “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors.”

The Russian law came under heavy criticism from gay rights activists and from Obama before the start of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia. In response, Obama included openly gay athletes as part of the official U.S. delegation to Sochi.

“In my opinion, Putin is right on these issues,” Graham writes. “Obviously, he may be wrong about many things, but he has taken a stand to protect his nation’s children from the damaging effects of any gay and lesbian agenda.”

“Our president and his attorney general have turned their backs on God and His standards, and many in the Congress are following the administration’s lead. This is shameful.”

With the caveat that “I am not endorsing President Putin,” Graham nonetheless praised Russia’s get-tough approach toward gay rights.

“Isn’t it sad, though, that America’s own morality has fallen so far that on this issue—protecting children from any homosexual agenda or propaganda—Russia’s standard is higher than our own?”

Graham also implicitly seems to side with Putin’s ally, embattled Syrian president Bashar Assad, in the ongoing civil war that has claimed more than 140,000 lives. Syria’s small Christian population has largely sided with the Assad regime throughout the three-year conflict.

“Syria, for all its problems, at least has

a constitution that guarantees equal protection of citizens,” Graham writes. “Around the world, we have seen that this is essential where Christians are a minority and are not protected. . . . Christians in Syria know that if the radicals overthrow Assad, there will be widespread persecution and wholesale slaughter of Christians.”

Graham’s father was a virulent anti-communist in his early years; in 1949 he called communism “a religion that is inspired, directed, and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.” But as he took his message around the world, he softened his rhetoric on many fronts, including politics and hot-button issues in the culture wars.

“If I had it to do over again, I would avoid any semblance of involvement in partisan politics,” the elder Graham, now 95, wrote in his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*.

For years, Billy Graham sought to take his gospel behind the iron curtain, ultimately preaching to huge crowds in Moscow in 1982. At the time, Putin was a young agent in the KGB. “In fact, he was in charge of monitoring foreigners in Leningrad [now St. Petersburg] when my father preached there in 1984,” the younger Graham wrote. “If he was eavesdropping on our meeting, which I hope he was, he heard the gospel!”

Since Franklin Graham took over the BGEA in 2001, he has steered the Graham franchise in a more political direction by openly questioning President Obama’s faith, endorsing a North Carolina measure that banned gay marriage, calling Islam an “evil and wicked religion,” and implicitly endorsing Mitt Romney’s 2012 White House bid.

Michael Hamilton, who has studied the Graham legacy as a historian at Seattle Pacific University, said both father and son have been known to wade into controversy, but Franklin Graham responds differently.

“When the firestorm would hit, Billy Graham would always backtrack or walk back his comments in some way,” Hamilton said. “But when the firestorm hits Franklin, he doesn’t seem to really care.”

Hamilton also questioned why Franklin Graham—who has received

wide praise for his relief work through his organization Samaritan’s Purse—didn’t approach Syria through the lens of “its enormous humanitarian crisis.”

A spokeswoman for the BGEA said March 14 that Franklin Graham was traveling and unavailable for comment. A statement from BGEA noted that his article went to press before the current crisis in Ukraine that has pitted Putin and Russia against the West.

“Franklin Graham consistently encourages Christians to be informed and take a stand for biblical values and biblical truth,” the statement said. “The Putin cover article was a way to provoke engagement of readers on this important issue and encourage further thought, prayer, and action.”

Marianne Duddy-Burke, who heads the gay Catholic group DignityUSA and is a member of the National Religious Leadership Roundtable of gay-friendly religious groups, said she’s met with gay and lesbian Russians who have been beaten, stabbed, and burned as Russia cracks down.

“It’s really disturbing when a religious leader seems to endorse laws that lead to this kind of behavior,” she said. —Kevin Eckstrom, RNS, with additions from Adelle M. Banks and Cathy Lynn Grossman

Ukraine crisis may split Russian Orthodox Church

As soon as troops massed on Ukraine’s border and well before Russian president Vladimir Putin declared that Crimea had rejoined Russia, Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church called for prayers “that brothers of one faith and one blood never bring destruction to one another.”

Russia has prided itself on the revival of Orthodox Christianity there after decades of Soviet persecution. But a heightened quarrel with Ukraine could splinter the Russian Orthodox Church.

That church has its roots in Kiev, where Prince Vladimir baptized his people as Christians in 988, an event viewed as a cornerstone of Russian and Ukrainian identity. It has even deeper roots in Crimea,

where, according to legend, Vladimir was himself baptized by Byzantine emissaries.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which has 12,500 congregations, is the largest of three Orthodox churches in Ukraine.

But while it has some degree of autonomy, with a Synod of Bishops that elects its own members, the church's leader, currently Metropolitan Onufry of Chernovtsy and Bukovina, although elected by the synod, has to be approved by Moscow.

In his sermon at the end of the service at Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow on March 14, Kirill, who has been known for his support of Putin, suggested that Ukraine has a right to self-determination. But he also stressed that it must not be trapped into a spiritual division from Russia.

"What we are referring to is the Russian world, the great Russian civilization that came from the Kievan baptismal font and spread across the huge expanse of Eurasia," he said, according to a transcript posted on the Moscow Patriarchate's website.

The "Russian world," or "Russky mir," has been an overriding theme for Kirill since he became patriarch in 2009, and it meshes with Putin's worldview, said Antoine Arjakovsky, director of research at the College des Bernardins in Paris and founder of the Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Lviv.

"For them, democracy is a danger," he said in an interview. "They invented a new mythology, the new ideology of 'Russky mir,' of the Russian idea, which would invent a kind of new theology of politics."

But for the churches in Ukraine, the protests that toppled President Viktor Yanukovich were also a galvanizing religious awakening and may lead to a seismic shift in church-state relations. Dramatic images of clergy with crosses standing between protesters and government forces went viral as the standoff escalated in January and February.

"The majority of the Ukrainian churches followed a paradigm common to Eastern Christianity; they aligned with the state," said Cyril Hovorun, a former chair of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's Department of External Church Re-

lations, who has also worked at the headquarters of the Moscow Patriarchate and is now studying church-state relations at Yale Divinity School.

"The churches in their majority on different levels supported the justifiable demands of the Maidan," he said, referring to the square in Kiev where the protests took place.

Andrei Zubov, a historian and expert in church-state relations at the prestigious Moscow State Institute of International Relations, was nearly fired early in March for writing an editorial that compared Putin's actions in Crimea to Hitler's *Anschluss* of the Sudetenland. He said that if events spill into war, a split between the Moscow and Kiev churches is inevitable.

"Putin has started an uncontrollable process," he said in a telephone interview from London.

Calls have been growing for an independent church that would unite all of Ukraine's Orthodox churches. (The other two are not recognized by the world's main Orthodox churches.)

Zubov said that if relations between Russia and Ukraine continue to deteriorate, the Patriarchate of Constantinople would eventually recognize a Ukrainian Church. "Ukraine is the second-biggest Orthodox country after Russia," said Arjakovsky. —Sophia Kishkovsky, RNS

People

■ **Tomas Halik**, a Roman Catholic priest and philosopher, onetime Czech political activist, and an advocate for religious freedom and interfaith dialogue, was named the 2014 Templeton Prize winner on March 13 for religious and spiritual progress. Halik, 65, a convert to Catholicism whose influences include religious figures such as Mother Teresa and author Graham Greene, has in recent years been increasingly active in building bridges between people of different faiths and between those who claim a religious tradition and those who do not. Saying he dislikes dogmatic figures on either end of the religious spectrum, Halik noted that his work is aimed at "seekers," the segment of those asking questions about reli-

gious and spiritual issues but who are unaffiliated with religion or atheism. "Let it be said over and over again: faith is not a question of problems but of mystery," Halik commented in a statement issued by the John Templeton Foundation, based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.

■ **Russell Crowe**, who plays the title role in the new Hollywood blockbuster *Noah*, lobbied hard for a personal audience with **Pope Francis**. What he got instead March 19 was a blessing. Crowe used social media to cajole Francis to watch *Noah*, which has drawn fire from religious groups that say the film takes too many liberties with the biblical story of Noah's ark and the great flood. Crowe also asked for a private audience with the pontiff. The Vatican's chief spokesman, Federico Lombardi, nixed both ideas; Francis would not watch the film and Crowe would not get a private audience. But Crowe, along with director Darren Aronofsky and some studio officials, were in the invitation-only section of St. Peter's Square where they reportedly met the pope briefly and received a blessing. The film began U.S. showings in late March and reaches Italian cinemas April 10.

■ **Ethicist Allen D. Verhey**, noted for his application of Christian ethics to the fields of medicine and health, died February 28 after a long struggle with amyloidosis. He was 68. Verhey taught at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, from 1975 to 2004, except for a stint as director of the Institute of Religion at the Texas Medical Center in the early 1990s. He joined the Duke Divinity School faculty in 2004 as professor of Christian theology. Verhey published widely and authored or edited a dozen books, including *Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life* (2002) and his most recent, *The Christian Art of Dying*. Commenting on a book Verhey wrote just before he went to Duke, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine*, a *CENTURY* reviewer called Verhey "a careful and gifted reader of the Bible" who perceived how modern medicine often operates with "distorted notions of personhood, compassion, freedom, autonomy, justice, parenting, and childhood."

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, April 20 (Easter Sunday)

Psalm 118:1–2, 14–24; Colossians 3:1–4

YOU HAVE DIED, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” I have no idea what this means. After reading this Colossians passage over and over, studying the Greek, and reviewing commentaries, I still don’t.

I believe, however, that this is like “the peace of God, which passes all understanding” in Philippians or “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” in John. It’s one of those distilled, cryptic passages that draw us into so much more than we can imagine. We never exhaust the meaning or the riches of such verses. Instead, they expand our capacity to wonder and give praise. They are invitations into God’s mystery.

Easter services are often pretty scripted, but Psalm 118 reminds us that Easter should be startling, mysterious: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” The experts are clueless; normal standards are askew. Speaking elsewhere of death and resurrection, Paul declares, “Behold! I tell you a mystery.” *Mysterion* appears in Colossians several times, too. “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” strikes me as a beautiful, inviting *mysterion*.

My mother, a United Methodist minister, died from Alzheimer’s disease. She wore not the white alb that she’d worn on many Easters but rather a blue hospital gown. When she was dying, our family gathered for the vigil. We didn’t know what to do, so we decided to read psalms.

I remember wondering which psalms we should read. Psalm 118 might have been a terrific choice. It celebrates God’s victory over death, calling us all to celebrate the steadfast love of the Lord and to rejoice in the day the Lord has made. But maybe she needed a psalm of lament, such as Psalm 22. “My tongue clings to my jaws”—how often had we moistened her parched lips with a sponge? Or a psalm of confession, since she knew she depended on God’s mercy.

We decided to read through all the psalms. We trusted that God’s Spirit would be at work as needed and that the fullness of my mother’s life with God—joy, lament, confession, and all—had not been defeated by tangles and plaques in her brain. Her life was hidden with Christ, hidden to us but still fully with Christ. And when “Christ who is [her] life is revealed, then [she] also will be revealed with him in glory.”

I think of friends and parishioners who are chronically lost or desperate, or who make the wrong choice time after time, despite the best efforts of others—the ones who the rest of us are ready to give up on. We see their lives quite plainly—there is nothing hidden or mysterious about their failure to

enjoy the abundant life of Jesus. We have given suggestion after suggestion. Perhaps we have offered money or space in our homes. We grow disappointed, partly because we feel helpless, even betrayed. We are frustrated because there are some situations that are beyond our efforts, so we cut our losses. We make peace with what is—and we hope that this “peace” does not upset our own enjoyment of the peace which passes all understanding. In a way, these people have died to us.

But what if their lives really are hidden with Christ in God? What if our Lord sees them not as hapless ne’er-do-wells but as children of glory, just like us? In the Greek, the *your* is plural, and *life* is singular—we share a common life, and this life together is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ is revealed, what will he reveal? That we, who appear to be alive, desperately need resurrection?

At a Quaker service, I heard about a prisoner. Out of the mysterious silence a young lawyer spoke, sharing with the assembly the story of his recent visit with this man. The lawyer was known among the prison staff as a spiritual person, so a corrections officer asked him to try to get through to this distressed perpetual convict. He recounted that he simply sat with the prisoner and told him that he believed with all his heart that God already dwelled in this prisoner’s heart. That was all—no sermon, no extensive prayers. The prisoner began to weep.

The lawyer did not cite Colossians 3, but he understood that the prisoner did not see that his life was indeed in Christ. Perhaps it was so deeply hidden beneath all kinds of mistakes, crimes, and sins that few could see it. The lawyer revealed a *mysterion*, and the prisoner was overcome by a glimpse of it.

So many lives are so deeply hidden with Christ in God. The Greek word for hidden is *crypto*—hidden, concealed, secret, or not noticed. *Not noticed*. Not noticed by others, perhaps not noticed even by themselves. We who are busily preparing for Easter—this *mysterion* addresses us as well. What are we failing to notice as we get ready? How might it be that the abundant lives that we have with Jesus remain just as concealed to us as the lives of Alzheimer’s patients?

The mystery of this passage is that we are just beginning to see the faintest glimpses of our lives with Christ and with one another. When Jesus died his life, too, was hidden. Now he lives and reigns in glory, and our life is hidden with him. We are destined for glory. I’ve looked *glory* up, too, but I have no idea what it actually means or what it’s going to look like. I’ll probably have to settle for glimpses—but I plan to peek into that mystery whenever I can.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, April 27

John 20:19–31; 1 Peter 1:3–9

THE STORY OF THOMAS in John 20, which may have been the book's original conclusion, salutes those who "have not seen and yet have come to believe." First Peter offers a similar commendation: "Although you have not seen him, you love him."

These texts offer encouragement for later generations of Christians. How do people who didn't see Jesus on earth come to faith? It's a critical question for John's Gospel—and for the church. John is clear that he writes in order to help readers come to believe that "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name." Separated in time and space from the resurrected Jesus, we depend on what others say. So our belief is somehow more special, indeed "blessed" (20:29).

Protestantism's emphasis on justification by faith intensifies this concern for how we come to believe without seeing the nail marks or putting our hands in Jesus' side. In some branches of this tradition, faith can become a monumental existential exercise—so much that "faith" can even resemble a "work." In this context, we can understand and even empathize with Thomas's refusal to accept the witness of the other disciples. Still, it can be hard for him to be a model for us.

Thomas wants to see and touch for himself—and behold! When Jesus appears to him and tells him to go ahead and experience the reality of his wounded body, Thomas discerns what neither Mary Magdalene nor the other disciples did in the passage just before: that Jesus is both "my Lord and my God." Thomas's determination to see for himself leads to a critical theological insight, an epiphany.

I wonder if we need to explore more seriously Thomas's approach to faith. We sing "We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight," but what is wrong with walking by both?

In a number of congregations, I have been blessed to be able to serve with people who are both scientists and Christians. Personally, I reserve the right to be skeptical of scientists. Growing up, I played with a toy brontosaurus. Now we are told that the brontosaurus was actually an apatosaurus, that Fred Flintstone ate apato-burgers. I also learned about the solar system and its nine planets. Now Pluto is just a planetoid, whatever that is. Why should I ever trust scientists?

Of course, such musings depend on a fundamental misunderstanding of science. It may be appropriate to fifth-grade exams, where there is one right answer. But it's inappropriate to adult citizenship in a complex world, in which science is

less fixed because it is constantly refining our understanding of the beauty of God's earth. While people sometimes set science and religion in opposition, the scientists I've been blessed to learn from have been great models of faith. Their Thomas-like commitment to seeing and touching—to the wise use of human perception—allows them to express their faith clearly.

In my experience, the complex angst sometimes associated with faith seems almost foreign to nurses, doctors, researchers, and science teachers. A theologian friend of mine goes to conferences on science and religion, and he observes that the scientists have an easier time talking about faith. The theologians, he notes, seem anxious or embarrassed about trying to bring science and religion together in some kind of dialogue without carefully enunciated epistemological caveats. The scientists, by contrast, are quite ready to speak about the created order of God as both faithful Christians and practicing scientists. They are comfortable and confident as they combine seeing and believing. I have also found that, on the whole, scientists who are Christians are quite likely to experience the peace that Jesus bestows on his followers in John. The rejoicing of 1 Peter is present in their lives, even as they too experience difficult times.

I am decades away from my last science course, but I marvel at how the habits and practices of scientists give them the freedom to speak confidently about faith. As I have listened in Bible studies and in informal conversations, I have come to respect their profound awareness of the limitations of human knowledge and the role of the larger scientific community. Medical professionals, for example, recognize just how little they sometimes can actually know about a person's condition. Sometimes best guesses come into play, based on what their colleagues observe in other patients. "Knowing" thus involves personal observation, communal wisdom, and respecting the limits of what can be known in the moment. Faith, similarly, tends to involve all three.

Thomas saw with his own eyes and believed. And he became aware of the central mystery of the Gospel of John: how the Word of God "became flesh and lived among us" (1:14). The scientists I have known also have a wonderful respect for mystery. They know what they know and don't know, and when they approach a boundary between the two, they gaze into the unknown with profound respect and awe. Walking both by faith and by sight, they teach us how to sing "For the Beauty of the Earth."

The author is David Keck, who is pastor of College Church and chaplain at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia.

A time to split?

by Amy Frykholm

WHEN PEOPLE CHOOSE to break the covenant that holds us together, there has to be some accountability," said Rob Renfroe, a United Methodist pastor. He was commenting on the decision by a United Methodist court to strip pastor Frank Schaefer of his clergy credentials because he had conducted a same-sex wedding ceremony for his son and refused to promise to refrain from such actions in the future.

Renfroe, who heads a conservative movement in the United Methodist Church known as Good News, was alluding to specific language in the UMC's governing document, the Book of Discipline, which calls clergy into a "covenant of mutual care and accountability." This document has recently been amended to state that clergy who perform same-sex weddings are guilty of a "chargeable offense."

A growing number of UMC clergy are performing such ceremonies in open defiance of the Book of Discipline, prompting a series of church trials which has bitterly divided the church. After Schaefer's trial in December, John Lomperis, United Methodist director for the Institute on Religion and Democracy, praised the ruling for upholding "biblical standards" and added that Schaefer "was not the first United Methodist minister to be defrocked for crossing these lines and will not be the last."

But it's not at all clear how much defrocking will take place. The case against Thomas Ogletree, the former Yale Divinity School dean who presided over the same-sex wedding of his son, was dropped by a UMC court in New York, and the bishop in New York, Martin McLee, declared that no trials will be conducted in the future. Instead of holding trials, McLee said, the New York Annual Conference will offer clergy "a process of theological, spiritual, and ecclesiastical conversation."

Other UMC bishops have themselves performed ceremonies for same-sex couples or have openly disagreed with the rules in the Book of Discipline. In the wake of Schaefer's conviction, Bishop Minerva Carcaño offered Schaefer an opportunity to work in her California-Pacific Annual Conference. In the Pacific Northwest, two complaints against clergy were resolved by suspending the clergy for 24 hours without pay—a sign that Bishop Grant Hagiya has no interest in prosecution.

Meanwhile, conservatives like Renfroe have been urging the denomination to hold clergy more accountable. The failure to prosecute clergy who violate the Book of Discipline is "confusing to the world and discouraging to the majority of our members," said Renfroe. Bishop Scott Jones of the Great Plains Annual Conference has declared that if 100 clergy in his

conference perform same-sex weddings, "then there will be 100 suspensions from ministry . . . followed by 100 trials."

The conflict in the United Methodist Church over what it means to break or to keep covenant in relation to same-sex weddings goes back to actions by the church's General Conference in 1972. The General Conference, which serves as the church's top legislative body, was considering a statement on social principles that included a section on the goodness of human sexuality. In the waning hours of the conference, an amendment was offered from the floor to declare the practice of homosexuality "incompatible with Christian teaching." The wording was inserted in a paragraph that affirms that all people are of "sacred worth" and urges the friends and families of gay and lesbian people not to "reject or condemn them."

Growing numbers of UMC clergy find parts of the Book of Discipline unacceptable.

A similar legislative move transpired in 1984. This time, the General Conference was considering qualifications for ordained ministry. A proposal from the floor led to the adoption of this statement: "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed, practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church."

These two changes ushered in an era of "don't ask, don't tell" for United Methodist clergy. Many gay and lesbian clergy were, in fact, ordained over the next 20 years. As long as they were not vocal about their sexual orientation and no problems emerged in congregations, many bishops and district superintendents chose to ignore the language in the Book of Discipline. According to Scott Campbell, a pastor in Cambridge, Massachusetts, "The preferred style of bishops and district superintendents was: if you don't embarrass me publicly, I won't embarrass you."

Activism on the issue did not cease. Some clergy announced their sexual orientation or performed same-sex ceremonies, and some were dismissed from ministry. In 1996, 1,300 United

Methodist clergy signed a letter urging the General Conference to grant full acceptance to gays and lesbians. “We believe it is time to break the silence and state where we are on this issue that is hurting and silencing countless faithful Christians. We will continue our responsibility to order and discipline of the church but urge our United Methodist churches to open the doors in gracious hospitality to all our brothers and sisters in the faith.”

Though activists spoke out, the prospects for changing the wording of the Book of Discipline were growing more remote. An unusual feature of the United Methodist Church compared to other mainline churches in the United States is that the UMC includes jurisdictions all over the world. The UMC’s Central Conference is made up of churches in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. These churches—some of the fastest growing in the denomination—account for some 5 million of the UMC’s total membership of 12.5 million. They also tend to be strong supporters of the rules prohibiting gay pastors and same-sex ceremonies. These churches hold the balance of power in the debate on homosexuality.

The next decisive move came in 2004, when the General Conference voted by the narrow margin of ten votes (455 to 445) to add a new provision to the Book of Discipline. The list of chargeable offenses against clergy was expanded to include being a “self-avowed practicing homosexual” and performing same-sex weddings.

This action opened a new arena for engagement: the judicial system of the United Methodist Church. In previous trials, clergy had been presented only with vague charges regarding their alleged “disobedience to the order and discipline of the church.” The specificity of the new rules set the stage for a new round of trials. The new clarity also galvanized opposition, because it made sexual orientation and the performance of a same-sex ceremony as serious an offense as embezzlement and sexual harassment.

Making the issue a chargeable offense “really upped the ante,” noted Tom Frank, a historian of United Methodism who teaches at Wake Forest University. “Instead of charging someone with disobedience to the order and discipline of the church, which would allow for serious conversation about a pastor’s motives, there is no wiggle room anymore.”

Though supporters of gay couples have met defeat at the General Conference, the network of clergy who find the language in the Book of Discipline unacceptable has grown in number and commitment. Matt Berryman, executive director of the Reconciling Ministries Network, said, “We’ve seen the movement grow from strength to strength. We’ve seen an increased commitment to the struggle, and people galvanized in intensity and urgency and support.”

Some activists who want to change the Book of Discipline pursue a strategy of “biblical obedience”: they act as if the laws they regard as unjust do not exist. They liken this effort to that of protesters in the civil rights movement who disobeyed segregation laws they regarded as unjust. “Without overstressing the analogy, it is still important to remember the pre-civil rights era South,” said Dorothee Benz of MIND (Methodists in New Directions). “If you had said to a black person, ‘You don’t



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like the law? Go vote for change,’ everyone knows in hindsight that there was no legislative route to change.”

Many clergy are committing to performing same-sex unions publicly and to talking about it. Benz believes that this strategy is powerful. “The beauty of the movement that we’ve been able to spark now in the United Methodist Church is that we are living ‘as if.’ We are providing the ministry that is needed and challenging the system in the only way that the system can be challenged at this moment.”

Those who support the language of the Book of Discipline see clergy trials as an important way of enforcing church discipline. Said Tom Lambrecht of Good News, “If we remove trials, there is no other method of holding people accountable. People can do whatever they want to do, which is the recipe for anarchy within the church.”

Tom Frank, who testified at the trial of Frank Schaefer, found the adversarial courtroom procedure unsettling. “You have a ‘prosecution table’ and a ‘defense table.’ You have a ‘judge’ sitting at an elevated table. You have an elevated ‘witness’ stand and a ‘jury’ box.” Frank noted that the counsel for the church was kept separate from the counsel for the defense. “This of course completely removes any possibility for further conversation. It becomes a forum for making speeches.” Frank thought to himself: “This is insane! This is a church! What are we doing?”

In Frank’s view, such trials represent not only a failure in public relations but a failure to be church, a failure to follow through on the idea of a clergy covenant.

According to the Book of Discipline, clergy are part of a “covenant of mutual care and accountability with all those who share this ordination.” Frank noted that because of the Methodist appointment system—the church assigns ministers to their positions—this covenant can be more primary for pastors than their bonds with a congregation. Clergy commit to meeting together and supporting one another.

On many sides of the divide over homosexuality, people decry the breaking of the covenant. For Renfroe, Lambrecht, and others, the covenant is broken whenever a pastor chooses to perform a same-sex wedding. But for a pastor such as Amy DeLong—who was put on trial by the church in 2011 for being a partnered lesbian and for officiating at the union of a lesbian couple—the notion of a covenant is diluted beyond recognition when it is invoked to ask her to be ashamed of who she is and to deprive others of pastoral care. She decries a clergy covenant that “requires participation in a conspiracy of silence, transforming even our friends into mute bystanders to ecclesiastical bullying.”

The word *covenant* hints at what many Methodists value highly in United Methodism: its connectionalism. Connectionalism is meant to be a corrective to a culture of individualism and provide support in ministry. Within United Methodism, pastors are ordained into a regional body called the annual conference, and they maintain that affiliation sometimes even when they move far beyond its boundaries. Within the annual conference, they submit to appointments made by a bishop, who assigns them to churches as itinerants. Beyond the annual conference, Methodists are connected regionally, nationally, and globally.

Frank believes that the current conflict is rooted in a failure of the covenant, a failure that goes far beyond the breaking of legislative rules. “We have merged many annual conferences. The conferences are so big that the clergy covenant is not viable. There is no way for several hundred people to have meaningful conversations. Many clergy do not know each other. They may know each other’s names, but they have never had a meaningful conversation, not even over a cup of coffee. This leads to a kind of individualism, a professional isolation, where everyone works on their own. It is inimical to the model of covenant that has been the essence of the connectional system.”

Frank’s point is illustrated by the way complaints have been

lodged against clergy. A complaint was filed against Ogletree after someone in his annual conference read an article about him in the *New York Times*. Sara Thompson Tweedy, a married lesbian, received the complaint made against her in the form of a collection of newspaper articles, presented to show that she was a “self-avowed, practicing homosexual”—a formulation she rejects.

Because the clergy covenant is not founded on real relationships, said Frank, there is a “vacant territory” for legalists who claim that a covenant means following the rules. “That is a very limited view of what a covenant is. Maybe there are marriages like that, but I wouldn’t want to be in one, would you?”

Many in United Methodism worry that those who perform same-sex ceremonies are acting as individuals, not as part of the connectionalism vital to United Methodism. One person I interviewed said, off the record, “I don’t get it. How can you claim to be part of the church and then say, ‘I am going my own way, with or without you’?”

The divide over homosexuality in the UMC may have grown too wide to bridge.

But Robin Hynicka challenges the idea that performing a same-sex wedding—which he did in November 2013 at Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia along with more than 36 other UMC clergy—was an act of individualism. His decision, he says, was based on a process of discernment undertaken with both his congregation and his colleagues. His decision to perform a same-sex wedding was not, in his view, an act of disobedience but an act through the Holy Spirit working through a deep affiliation with his congregation and its needs.

Jeremy Smith, a pastor who blogs at hackingchristianity.com, agrees that accusations of individualism are misplaced when directed at activist clergy. He believes that these clergy are not acting as outliers and individuals but as a “sustained community that consistently comes to the conclusion that this is discriminatory. And they come to this conclusion across differences of age, gender, and region. It doesn’t even matter that they agree on theology. I think you have more authority to speak up because you are not an isolated individual—you are part of a community.”

Those who support the rules in the Book of Discipline are pushing for more legislative steps to enforce them, perhaps by instituting mandatory penalties. Another effort, said Lambrecht of Good News, focuses on “creative solutions that would allow people to leave the church and find a body of Christians that they would be more amenable to be a part of.” Lambrecht would like to make it easier for pastors who disagree with the language of the Book of Discipline to leave the church.

The divide over homosexuality in the UMC may have grown too wide to bridge. Jack Jackson, professor of mission at Claremont School of Theology, believes that it may be time for

He’s not here

There’s no Jesus on the page.
No church or priest or wafer.
He’s a dark figure. An inky
character he is, that Jesus.
Here there’s no ink for him.

These are not holy words
and this is no evangelistic sermon.
It’s no polemic. This poem’s plain,
as plain as rain and oil and wine.
It may speak of a rough-cut slab,

but there’s no altar and no wood.
There’s no ram or holocaust.
The writing’s black marks
like smudges on a linen cloth
under a kind and lambent light.

Greg Huteson

the church to cut its losses and separate. "Every four years we have this vitriolic conversation that has only gotten worse and worse. . . . I think we are stuck. How can we get unstuck? How long can the church in progressive areas hang on and continue to decline? Or would it be better to say, we are brothers and sisters in this Methodist movement, but really we can't live together anymore? Let's bless each other in our different ministries and move on."

Options for schism are on the table, and both sides make arguments for it. But what exactly would a schism look like? When the United Methodists split over slavery in 1844, it was along regional lines. But now conservative and progressive churches can be found in every state. United Methodists have prided themselves on their diversity. Even though positions on homosexuality within the church can to some degree be regionally mapped, there is little chance that a split could take place along regional lines. Instead, experts say, the church is likely to end up with two geographically overlapping national organizations.

But annual conferences own the property on which each individual church rests. When Lambrecht proposes that individual clergy leave the UMC for other churches, he does not envision them taking property and congregations with them. To get to the point where two national churches could be formed, the church as a whole would have to allow individual churches to choose which newly formed organization they will join. There are no signs that this will happen without a bitter battle. And, as some point out, not every congregation or every United Methodist can be so neatly divided. The ax would fall hardest on congregations that have worked to bridge divides and maintain diversity in their pews.

Several people I spoke to suggested that one way to move forward might be to give the UMC jurisdictions in the United States a measure of autonomy similar to that given to the Central Conference. Churches in the Central Conference are allowed to make culturally specific rules that fit their particular situation. For example, the requirements for clergy education do not apply in some African countries.

While there is a lot of talk about greater autonomy, Jackson is not sure

anyone actually wants it. Progressives do not want to be in a church in which some parts are allowed to discriminate against gays and lesbians, and conservatives don't want to be part of a church in which gays and lesbians can be clergy, even if they serve in another region. If conservatives were eventually to lose the vote on changing the language of the Book of Discipline, some would simply leave. "Some of them leave the next Sunday and some of them leave in the next four years, by the next General Conference. I am not sure there are that many people who want to find a middle ground," Jackson said.

There are many people, however, who believe that there is still room for lower-level, lower-stakes conversations. They believe that the clergy trials have pointed out the failure to have meaningful dialogue and revealed the collapse of the clergy covenant, and they want to invest in a covenant revival.

Bishop Sally Dyck of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference points to Acts 15 as one possible starting place for a new conversation—one that does not try to change people's minds about homosexuality. "At the end of Acts 15, no one in Jerusalem had changed their minds about how they felt about gentiles, but they had somehow been convinced by the witness of Paul that there needed to be space [for them]. They found some way to be together. Are there conditions that would help us live together?"

Activists on both sides are not necessarily eager for such an effort, which may serve only to postpone the day of reckoning. **CC**

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Missing in Mexico

Text and photos by Paul Jeffrey

SANTOS DEL SOCORRO ROJAS knew she'd find her son Jorge Reyes one day. She just wasn't sure how. He'd gone north, as do many who flee poverty in Nicaragua, but after a few weeks they'd lost touch. The years went by and her anguish grew, until one day someone from the Jesuit Refugee Service knocked on her door and asked if she'd like some help.

That knock led Rojas to join a caravan of 45 Central Americans, mostly mothers looking for their disappeared children, who traveled to Mexico last December. Rojas was one of the lucky ones. On December 16 church workers were in Tapachula, a sprawling border city in the southern state of Chiapas, and took Rojas to a small shack where her son lived. After nine years of separation she embraced Reyes.

"I always had faith. I knew the Lord would send me angels to help me find my child," she said.

As hundreds of thousands of migrants pass through Mexico every year, angels are in short supply. There are plenty of devils—dressed as police or covered with gang tattoos—who are beating migrants, throwing them off trains if they can't pay the "tax," and forcing young migrant women into prostitution. Yet a feisty community of church activists remains committed to practicing hospitality toward the stranger, which in Mexico's case starts with ending a very profitable pattern of violence.

The angel who appeared to Rojas and her son was Olga Sánchez Martínez, director of Jesus the Good Shepherd of the Poor and Migrant Shelter in Tapachula. The caravan visited the shelter, which provides care for migrants who've been injured or fallen ill on their way north, and someone recognized Reyes from the photo that his mother wore around her neck. They remembered that he once worked at a local carwash.

Sánchez and Rojas set off to follow the lead. The car wash had closed, but someone at a nearby car wash recognized the image and said Reyes lived near a certain bar. The group went there and found that Reyes had moved away two years ago. But a man there knew someone at a bicycle repair shop who had helped the Nicaraguan man move his belongings. Sánchez and Rojas tracked down that man, and he agreed to lead them to Reyes. Sánchez gave him money to put fuel in his motorcycle, and they followed him deep into one of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

"He got off his motorcycle and disappeared into a warren of shacks, then reappeared and told us to wait a moment," Sánchez said. "After a minute or so Jorge came out. He was a

dead ringer for his mother! I thought his mother's heart would burst through her chest with joy."

The emotional encounter was one of 12 wonderful moments on the 16-day trip when members of the caravan either located their own family member or discovered someone else's lost relative. The women carried hundreds of photos that they laid out on the ground in village plazas and other settings and asked everyone who passed by if they recognized anyone. (It was the ninth such caravan and produced more reunions than any of the previous ones.)

At times, however, the result wasn't good news. In Puerto Madero, a fishing village on the Pacific coast west of Tapachula, a resident recognized one young woman's photo.

Record numbers of Central Americans are making the perilous journey north.

Caravan members traced her to a neighborhood where residents recognized the woman's photo but said she had died four years ago of AIDS, contracted while working in the city's bars. The young woman was buried in a nearby cemetery, but much of that burial ground, including the woman's grave, had washed out to sea during a storm.

Members of the caravan held a demonstration along the Mexico-Guatemala border, pressing Mexican authorities for better treatment for migrants, including the implementation of transit visas, a measure that would allow migrants to abandon dangerous travel on freight trains and make them less vulnerable to abuse by criminal gangs and police.

Most participants returned home with more unanswered questions. Yet Iris Yaconda, a Nicaraguan psychologist who provided emotional support for caravan participants, says the women no longer feel isolated.

"These are women who live in constant grief, not knowing what happened to their loved ones. Their stages of grieving have no end. They suffer sleepless nights and depression. But in the caravan they found other women who are living through the same experience," said Yaconda. "Despite not finding their loved ones, they push themselves to keep struggling, to claim



SEARCHERS: A woman helps lay out photos on the ground in Puerto Madero, Mexico, in December 2013. The photos were brought by a caravan of Central Americans, mostly mothers looking for their disappeared or trafficked children, who came to Mexico for 17 days.

their right to hope. They aren't just victims. Their pain pushes them forward, not back into retreat. And knowing they have friends in so many places, other families and priests and shelters that care for the migrants, they know they aren't alone."

As the numbers of migrants passing through continues to rise, the migrants and their families will need all the friends they can find in Mexico. Many studies, including some by the Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project, indicate that the number of Mexican immigrants in the United States stabilized after 2007–2009. But current economic conditions and political repression farther south are driving record numbers of Hondurans, Guatemalans, and others to make the perilous journey north. Although deportations from the United States fell slightly from 2012 to 2013, the number of migrants flown home to Central America increased.

A November statement from 13 Catholic bishops on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border recognized "a new flow of migrants from all social and economic classes" fleeing instability and violence in Central America. Particularly worrisome, the bishops reported, is a dramatic increase in the number of unaccompanied children and adolescents heading north in recent months. "This relatively new population of young migrants is particularly vulnerable to the abuse and exploitation of human traffickers," the bishops stated.

As the numbers of northbound migrants steadily rise, many ordinary Mexicans have stepped forward to welcome them. Since 1995, women in Amatlán de los Reyes in the state of Veracruz have greeted the trains that roll through their town heavily laden with migrants. The women cook food and thrust

it into the hands that reach out from the top and sides of moving trains. In nearby Tierra Blanca, women who live along the railroad tracks recently came out en masse with sticks and brooms to chase away a squad of police who were beating a group of migrants who had refused to pay bribes.

While such acts of solidarity may be tolerated, threats to the underlying profitability of migration won't be. That's why journalist Gregorio Jiménez was kidnapped in February and his body found in a shallow grave six days later. He had investigated a bar where several migrants had reportedly disappeared. Initial police reports indicate that the bar owner paid to have him silenced.

As dangerous as it has become for journalists in places like Veracruz, at least Jiménez's killing got some public attention. Usually when a migrant suffers or dies, few people care because migrants have been so dehumanized in Mexican culture.

"Discrimination and xenophobia have increased in recent years," said Father Heyman Vázquez Medina, a priest in Huixtla who runs the St. Francis of Assisi migrant shelter. "So to talk about a Central American today is to talk about a delinquent, a person who's going to rob you and abuse all the women. Migrants are blamed for everything. If a migrant does something illicit, it's big news. But when he or she suffers assassination, kidnapping, extortion, robbery, and beatings, no one says anything. If a migrant dies, no one says anything."

Vázquez says the Mexican government isn't interested in changing things.

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JOURNEYS: Migrants and others cross the Suchiate River where it forms a border between Guatemala and Mexico. The river crossing is part of the main route that Central American migrants follow on their way north. Santos del Socorro Rojas kisses her son Jorge Alberto Reyes Dávila, with whom she was reunited last December in Tapachula, Mexico, after nine years of separation.

“There’s collusion between the authorities and organized crime. The delinquents can charge migrants \$100 to ride the train north, or they can kidnap migrants, and the government doesn’t do a thing. It’s really a policy of extermination,” he said.

In some places the government is worse than organized crime when it comes to mistreating migrants. A Catholic migrant shelter in Saltillo, Coahuila, documented 113 cases of human rights violations against immigrants occurring in the last six months of 2013. Forty-seven percent were caused by the federal police. The vicious Los Zetas cartel and the Mara Salvatrucha gang were responsible for 16 percent and 8 percent, respectively. The remaining cases were credited to state and municipal police forces.

Whatever force is behind this systemic violence, including 20,000 migrant kidnappings a year that produce an unknown sum of ransom payments from terrorized families back home or in the United States, the powerful send the message that they will not tolerate the church messing around in their business. That’s why Tomás González, a Franciscan friar who runs the Seventy-Two, a migrant shelter in Tenosique, Tabasco, has received repeated death threats from Los Zetas. The police force has provided him and several other migrant defenders with bodyguards—but this is the same police force that competes with Los Zetas to rob, extort, and terrorize the migrants.

The Seventy-Two takes its name from the body count of a 2010 massacre near the border with Texas. Los Zetas kidnapped 58 men and 14 women, squeezed them for ransoms, and then reportedly assassinated those who failed to follow orders.

González’s shelter is only one outpost on a string of safe houses along the migrant route north. It has become part of an underground railroad of sorts for the poor seeking economic

opportunity in the north. Largely run by church folks, the group carries out a ministry of accompaniment with migrants. When migrants go missing and their families come to look for them, González and the others accompany them as they visit the morgues, prisons, brothels, hospitals, and cemeteries where migrants are likely to end up.

They also speak up for the need for immigration reform, which in Mexico means demanding a halt to the killing of migrants, as well as the provision of transit visas to those passing through on their way north. Such advocacy has obviously touched a nerve in the country’s body politic, threatening the profits of several important sectors, so pressure has mounted on the church’s leaders to reign in those who meddle with migrant issues.

As a result, last year Mexico’s Catholic bishops attempted to seize direct control of all but one of Mexico’s 54 migrant shelters, which have been run by the church’s Human Mobility Ministry—never a ministry on which the bishops kept a tight leash. Until now. The bishops are also moving to control more directly the many church-based migrant soup kitchens, health and education centers, and human rights groups that are run by grassroots activists under the large umbrella of the church. Rather than emerging from the concrete praxis of individual parishes and dioceses, these pastoral projects are now destined to become one more “top-down ecclesiastical project,” according to Alejandro Solalinde, a priest who runs a shelter in Ixtepec in Oaxaca—and who also has to have police bodyguards.

The impact of this restructuring on the church’s critical ministries with migrants remains to be seen. But activists like Solalinde are worried. “Life grows from the ground up,” he said. “Things look very different from above. They have to be solved on the ground.”

CC

From fear to calm

by James Martin

TWO YEARS AGO I traveled with a Jesuit friend to the Holy Land. The experience was overwhelming. When I first caught sight of the Sea of Galilee and saw its shimmering blue-green waters surrounded by pinkish sandy hills under a blazing sun, it was like a dream. One afternoon, after a full day of visiting sites around the lake, I found myself on the veranda of the Church of the Beatitudes at a Franciscan complex. The chapel overlooks the lake from an impressive height and gave me a commanding view of Galilee. To my left I could see the ruins of Capernaum, a mile or so from where I stood. Beyond that was Bethsaida, where Peter and Andrew lived. In front of me, across the sea, was the land of the Gerasenes, where Jesus healed a demoniac.

I sat down to pray and found that for the first time in my life I was able to pray with my eyes open. I practice classic Ignatian contemplation: you imagine yourself in various scripture passages, trying your best to see the place in the mind's eye. But this time I didn't have to do any imagining. This time it was all laid out before me. I could even see fishermen on the shoreline below.

Suddenly a terrific wind arose, sweeping all the dry palm leaves off the portico. I laughed, because I really wanted a storm to blow up. Let me tell you why.

I've been a spiritual director for more than 20 years. It is one of my greatest joys. Spiritual direction helps people notice where God is active in their prayer and in their daily lives. While it may overlap with a number of other practices, spiritual direction is neither psychotherapy (which focuses mainly on the psychological underpinnings of a person's problems), nor pastoral counseling (which focuses mostly on problem-solving in a spiritual setting), nor confession (which focuses on sin and forgiveness). Spiritual directors are trained specifically to enable a person to recognize God's activity; this means helping that person with prayer.

What topics come up in spiritual direction? Anything significant that arises in prayer, moments in your daily life when God felt close, and frustrations over how God might seem absent. Being a good spiritual director requires formal training, which includes learning how to listen well and notice where a person might be overlooking God's activity. It's not enough simply to be prayerful. St. Teresa of Ávila, the 16th-century Carmelite nun, famously said that if she had a choice of a spiritual director who was wise or one who was holy, she would choose the wise person. Optimally, you would want both!

My first spiritual directee approached me when I'd been a Jesuit for only two years. I was studying philosophy at Loyola University in Chicago, and an undergraduate in the course asked if he could see me for spiritual direction. I asked my own spiritual director if I was ready. "You're ready to be a director when people start asking you," he said. It was moving to hear and see how God was at work in this young man's life. Directing him also introduced me to a common experience: my faith grew as I saw how God was at work in someone else. It's a spiritual boost to see God's activity in others, particularly

The raging sea represents chaos and danger.

during times when you yourself feel dry. It's like doubting the wind and then seeing it sweep across a field of tall grass. You say to yourself, Ah, there it is!

The next summer I spent two weeks in a spiritual directors' training program at a Jesuit retreat house outside of Toronto. Years later, after my ordination, I spent an entire summer at a Jesuit retreat house near Cincinnati, Ohio, learning about spiritual direction techniques, most of which hinge on being a good listener. "Slow, silent, and stupid," goes one mantra. Don't rush; don't be afraid of silence; and don't assume that you know what the other person means; ask.

Since then I've served as a spiritual director for dozens of people, both on a regular monthly basis and during retreats—weekends and eight-day and 30-day retreats. It is rarely dull. In Ohio one of our instructors told us, "If you're bored in spiritual direction, it probably means that the other person is not talking about God. They might be talking about problems at work, difficulties at home, or health issues, but they're not yet talking about God. Because the Holy Spirit is never boring!"

In my experience as a spiritual director, I've noticed that a handful of Bible passages seem to help almost everyone. One

*James Martin is a Jesuit priest and editor at large for America magazine. This article is excerpted from his new book, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, and is published with permission of HarperCollins. © James Martin 2014.*



Photo of the Sea of Galilee by James Martin

such passage is Jeremiah 29:11, which begins, “For surely I know the plans I have for you,” and invites the reader to meditate on God’s provident care. But the passage that is by far the most helpful for people going through difficult times is the stilling of the storm. I know of no other passage that is as helpful to Christians. It has been helpful to me, too.

The story is essentially the same in the three synoptic Gospels, though in each the story begins on slightly different notes. I’ll focus on Mark’s account. In the passage where Jesus asks his disciples to cross to the “other side” of the Sea of Galilee, the reader notices two things. First, Jesus’ request comes at the close of a long day of preaching from a fishing boat. The crowds have just heard the parable of the sower. Now Jesus is going to leave them behind to sail with the disciples. Mark tells us that other boats accompany them; these may have carried the larger group of followers. (The number of apostles, disciples, and followers was increasing.) Perhaps Jesus will reveal something special to the smaller group. So readers may think it’s a hopeful time.

The reader will notice something else: it is evening. On the sea this can be a time not of anticipation, but fear.

Before the story begins in earnest, the English translation includes a charming phrase. “And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was.” For many years I wondered about those words. What did it mean—“just as he was”? The English might be vague, but the Greek is clearer. A literal translation would be: “They took him as he was in the ship.” That is, Jesus was already in the boat, so the disciples just piled in. But the opaque English translation unintentionally reminds us that we need to take Jesus “as he is” rather than trying to make him as we would wish him to be. The

disciples often had a hard time dealing with Jesus as he was, just as we do.

Suddenly a great windstorm arises on the sea, and the waves begin to swamp the boat. The Greek suggests a kind of tornado. Even today storms suddenly stir up the Sea of Galilee, the result of dramatic differences in temperatures between the shoreline (680 feet below sea level) and the surrounding hills (up to 2,000 feet). The strong winds that funnel through the hills easily whip up waves in the relatively shallow waters (200 feet). Today a boating industry for pilgrims thrives on the Sea of Galilee; boat owners take pilgrims on a tour and include a mass aboard the vessel. A few pilgrims told me that while they were at sea a storm arrived without warning. They were thrilled to witness a biblical “storm at sea.”

But the disciples would not have felt any pleasure. In Jesus’ day storms were terrifying, and water held rich symbolism: it symbolized life and a means of purification, but it also held out the potential for death and was an occasion of danger. The psalmists speak of God’s power over the seas and use water as a symbol of peril: “Save me, O God,” says the psalmist, “for the waters have come up to my neck” (Ps. 69). Raging seas and howling storms would have represented to Jesus’ contemporaries chaos and danger. Jewish belief was that the sea could also be the abode of demonic forces.

On a less theological level, sea voyages were simply dangerous, as St. Paul would attest. A storm at sea could be frightening even for experienced fishermen. Far worse is the storm at sea at night.

Not long after a terrible hurricane hit the East Coast of the United States and caused widespread destruction, I saw footage of a woman describing the panic she felt as the storm surge hit. She described the waves barreling up her street,

bursting in the door of her house, and rising up to her neck; she could barely get the words out—the fear in her voice was still palpable. A cubic meter of water weighs over 2,000 pounds, which explains the destruction it can cause during a hurricane or flood, crushing everything in its path. This is a window into the kind of terror that the water would have held in Jesus' day.

But in the face of the chaotic storm Jesus is calm. Beyond calm. "He was in the stern, asleep on the cushion," says Mark. In their book *The Gospel of Mark*, John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington say that "untroubled sleep" signals trust in God's protection even in the most dire of circumstances.

A friend had told me about the nearby Yigal Alon Museum, so I visited. Inside was the ancient Sea of Galilee Boat, the remarkably well-preserved remains of a first-century fishing craft discovered in 1986 when a drought lowered the level of the lake. The dark, wooden vessel, supported by metal struts, is large—almost 27 feet long by seven feet wide. I was touched by the evidence of numerous repairs, the reuse of timbers, and many wood types (12), some salvaged from other boats. The boat seemed to have, as the brochure said, "a long work life and an owner of meager means."

A reconstruction of the boat in another room included a raised wooden ledge on which several people could sit. So it would have been easy for Jesus to find a place to sleep, perhaps on a cushion or a bag of sand used for ballast or comfort.

But it wasn't easy for his friends to understand how he could sleep in the violent gale. "They woke him up," said Mark, "and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'" Among his disciples were four fishermen, and even they were afraid. It must have been a hellacious storm.

Thomas Didymus

When Mary Magdalene said she'd seen
the Lord it was strangely disappointing
One of the worst women saved from the street
to have been first I knew it must be true
that's just what he would do but then
when I was the only one to fight fear
& search for myself the others lagging behind
it was like the soldier's spear went right through
me too when I returned to hear
the others bragging (that was the worst)
that I was the only one not to have been there
not to have seen where his hands were pierced
I went into denial *I won't believe* I said
Anything less than my fingers in his wounds
won't be enough My words sounded odd
to my ears A week later I was among
them when he appeared & called my bluff
My Lord & my God Conviction rolled off my tongue

D. S. Martin

Jesus rises up. Matthew uses *egertheis*, which conveys not simply standing, but rising to his full height to confront the storm. He "rebukes" the wind and says to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" The word Mark uses for Jesus' rebuke (*epetimēsen*) is the same used for his commands to evil spirits, and Jesus' phrasing is similar to the way he rebuked the demon in the synagogue at Capernaum: "Be silent, and come out of him!"

At once there is a "great" calm. The Greek *megalē* is the same word used for the "great" wind, highlighting both natural danger and Jesus' power over it. We can tell that the disciples are terrified, because Jesus says to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" A more literal translation of Mark's Greek—*pōs ouk echete pistin*—may better convey Jesus' amazement at the disciples' reaction: "How is it that you still have no faith?"

Their terror is not surprising. We're so used to some Gospel stories that they can seem predictable. But sit on the narrow wooden seats next to the disciples, and Jesus' power will render you speechless. The disciples are frightened not only by the miraculous—or what might seem magical—power, but also by what it meant. Controlling nature was the prerogative of God alone. The creation story in Genesis recounts God's dividing of the waters, separating the rains above and the seas below, and also exerting power over chaotic nature. Jews aboard the boat might have remembered one of many psalms on that same theme: "You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them" (Ps. 89).

The next line is stunning: *ephobēthēsan phobon megan*. They feared a great fear.

Fear of the storm has morphed into fear of God, the awe accompanying a display of divine power, a theophany. When they next open their mouths, I imagine them having a hard time getting the words out: "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

The carpenter who has just offered homey parables on the shoreline now reveals a supernatural command over the waters. I can only imagine the disciples sitting in stupefied silence as the voyage continued, now over calm waters.

Why has this story proved so helpful to people? Out of all my directees, only one was a fisherman. But everyone faces stormy times, when God's presence is hard to perceive. One of the most common struggles in the spiritual life is a feeling of God's absence during painful times. Even some of the saints report this. Perhaps it's because when we're struggling we tend to focus on the area of pain. It's natural, but it makes it more difficult to see where God might be at work in other places.

A young man whom I'll call Aaron came to me for monthly spiritual direction. With palpable sorrow he explained how he felt God had abandoned him after he was diagnosed with a chronic illness. His sense of God's presence, his ability to see God around him, the ease with which he had once prayed—all had evaporated. Thus his sadness over his physical condition was exacerbated by a sense of abandonment. When I asked him if he had ever prayed about the stilling of the storm, he wept. Just mentioning the passage evoked tears—he instantly connected with the disciples' feelings of abandonment.

When we next met, Aaron said that he was embarrassed about what had happened in a prayer. He had imagined himself aboard the boat and pictured the waves crashing around him. He saw the waves as apt images of his inner turmoil. But when he thought about Jesus sleeping, he shouted aloud in his apartment, “Get up! Get up! Where are you, Jesus? Why don’t you care about me?” As he recounted this he wept.

We talked about God’s ability to handle Aaron’s feelings of anger and abandonment, since God has been able to handle powerful emotions since (at least) the time of the psalms. “How long, O Lord?” laments the psalmist. “Will you forget me forever?” (Ps. 13). This is what Aaron, the disciples, and countless believers have said to God.

Expressing his emotions honestly made it easier for Aaron to talk to God honestly, and that in turn enabled him to notice God’s presence in other parts of his life. Aaron’s honesty didn’t remove the physical pain, but it helped to reestablish an open relationship with God. When you say only the things that you believe you should say, any relationship grows cold, including one with God. Once Aaron was able to be open and transparent in his prayer, he felt God’s presence. “Funny,” he said. “It made me feel calm. Like the sea after Jesus stilled it.”

Were we somehow able to ask the disciples why they were afraid, they would likely scoff, “Why wouldn’t we be afraid?”

In the spiritual life, fear leads to inertia.

Those living along the Sea of Galilee knew what storms could do to boats—and to people. Fear made sense. Without a healthy fear of the elements, Galilean fishermen wouldn’t have taken the necessary precautions to protect themselves, their boats, and their catches.

But Jesus warns against fear in the spiritual life. When it comes to God’s activity, fear is dangerous because it turns us away from God. Rather than focusing on what God can do, we’re tempted to focus on what it seems God cannot do—that is, protect us. Indeed, Jesus’ earthly life is bracketed by warnings against fear. The angel announcing his conception says to his mother, “Do not be afraid.” The angel announcing his resurrection to the women at the tomb says, “Do not be afraid.”

Jesus’ counsel against fear reveals several truths—a few things he wanted us to know about the world, and about God.

First, God has not come to harm you. God’s presence should not prompt fear, for God always comes in love. Second, don’t fear the new. God’s entrance into your life may mean something will change, but unanticipated doesn’t necessarily mean frightening. Third, there is no need to fear things you don’t understand. If it comes from God, even the mysterious should hold no terror. You may not understand fully what God is asking, but this is no cause to be frightened. At the annunciation Mary couldn’t foresee what her future would hold, but she was empowered to fear not. And at the resurrection the disciples probably didn’t understand what, or more precisely

who, stood before them, but they soon learned not to be afraid.

A healthy fear may remind fishermen to guard against contingencies like a storm, but in the spiritual life fear can lead to the inertia of hopelessness. It can paralyze us, destroy our trust, crush our hope, and turn us inward in unhealthy ways. Unchecked, it can lead us into despair—if we conclude that only woe can come out of the present situation, which is an implicit denial of God’s ability to do the impossible.

Notice that the disciples encounter fear where they are most comfortable—aboard their own boats in Galilee. Especially when God enters into our familiar surroundings—cozy places or parts of our lives where everything seems settled—we may be particularly frightened. Perhaps there is a sudden thaw in a frozen relationship. Maybe you fear this new challenge to your old ways. “What are you doing here, God?” we may say. “Don’t make me let go of my resentments. I’m too settled.” We may not fear the storms as much as the calm after the storm.

Even in these places Jesus says, “Do not be afraid.”

The stilling of the storm is similar to another incident in which Jesus brings calm: his walking on water. Without delving into too much detail, we can briefly sketch out the narrative that appears in Matthew, Mark, and John. In all three Gospels the story follows the feeding of the 5,000 on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. After feeding the crowd Jesus immediately dismisses the disciples and “makes” or “forces” them to board their boats and cross the sea. There is no indication why the journey is so urgent, unless we take the next line as an explanation: “After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.” Perhaps his insistence was a way of saying, “I really need some time alone.”

Near the traditional site of the feeding is a hollowed-out space on a hill called the Eremos Cave, in which Jesus may have prayed. It is a small ovoid opening in the rocky hillside, perhaps five feet high by ten feet wide. The morning my friend and I scrambled up to see it (it’s a few hundred feet from the shoreline), we found the cave empty and the dusty site barren save for an empty beer bottle sitting insolently at the opening. The cave can accommodate a single person and provides some shelter from the elements; if it existed in Jesus’ day (and there’s no reason to think it didn’t), it would have made an ideal place for solitude.

By sunset the disciples’ boat has reached the middle of the Sea of Galilee. (The sentence includes a Greek word: “many *stadia* away from the land,” with a *stadium* being an ancient measure of roughly 200 yards.) From his far-off position Jesus sees the disciples straining at the oars in the face of an adverse or “contrary” wind. Matthew says the boat is being “battered by the waves.”

Then “early in the morning he came towards them . . . walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by.” The disciples are terrified and cry out in fear; they think they are seeing a ghost.

The one standing upon the waves greets them. “Take heart; it is I,” Jesus says simply, which may be a gently human way of reassuring them. Or it may be an echo of God’s divine declaration to Moses in the book of Exodus, “I am who I am.”

“Do not be afraid,” says Jesus, who boards the boat. The wind ceases. To describe the overwhelming emotions of the dis-

ciples Mark writes literally, “very much exceedingly in themselves standing outside” (*lian ek perissou en heautois existanto*). They were utterly beside themselves. Although they have just witnessed the miracle of the loaves and fishes, they still do not understand who he is. Their hearts, says Mark, are “hardened.”

Matthew’s addition to the story is well known even to those who aren’t familiar with the New Testament. Peter answers Jesus with a challenge: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

Why does Peter request this? Is he looking for proof that the one speaking in the teeth of the gale is truly Jesus? Does Peter want to arrogate to himself God’s prerogative, power over nature? Or is he simply curious to see if he can do what Jesus is doing? What fisherman wouldn’t want command over the waters?

In response Jesus says, “Come.”

Peter begins to walk on the water but then notices the strong wind. Distracted by danger, Peter fears, begins to sink, and cries out, “Lord, save me!” much as the disciples did during the storm. Taking his eye off Jesus means that he can do nothing on his own. Jesus stretches out his hand, takes hold of Peter, and says, perhaps bemused, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Jesus brings Peter back into the boat, where all prostrate themselves and pronounce him the Son of God. In Matthew the disciples are more able to apprehend Jesus’ identity. Once again, the disciples may have recalled the psalms that speak of God’s saving those in danger of drowning.

In both Matthew and Mark, Jesus manifests his awesome power over the sea. In both instances the disciples are terrified. In both Jesus warns them against fear. But besides counseling against fear, Jesus offers another blessing desperately needed today: calm.

Let’s consider this in light of the frenzied state of our emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual lives today. The more I listen to people, the more I hear them speak about their lives using the same words: overworked, overbooked, stressed-out, nuts, and insane. “I have no time for my family.” “I have no time to pray.” “I barely have time to think.” This does not describe everyone’s life. But our culture has told us that the busier we are, the more important we are.

Some of this pressure may be the result of an economy in which more hours are demanded from employees. Some of it can be traced to increasing pressure from technology. Newer forms of communication mean that it’s easy to be always connected. You’re never far from anyone intent on contacting you. But some of our busyness is the inevitable outcome of a world where overactivity is praised. And if everyone else is busy, who are we to opt out?

It may also mask a form of pride. Being busy may indicate generosity; some people pour themselves out for others in a selfless way. But sometimes busyness is the way we prove (consciously or not) to ourselves that we are important. This tendency is then multiplied out in the community, creating a society in which extreme busyness is a badge of importance. It may also mask an inability to be still. What would it mean if we weren’t running around like demoniacs? What would happen if we weren’t overbooked? What would we do with ourselves if there weren’t some task at hand?

Not long ago I found myself in a kind of storm. Trying to be

generous, I had agreed to do many talks around the country. This had been my pattern for the last several years. I enjoy speaking to groups, but it was becoming unmanageable.

One weekend the logistics of a trip were bollixed up. There was confusion over where I was staying, a grueling itinerary, delayed flights, and an ear infection. A cold hung on for two months. Looking over my schedule for the coming year, I began to worry. How could I continue at this pace? Gradually I noticed something else within me: a deep desire to live a calmer, quieter, and more contemplative life. A great many people were counting on me for lectures and retreats, yet the more I thought about them, the more my longing increased. I was bewildered. Should I cancel engagements and disappoint others or continue on and disappoint

Jesus invites us to a place of calm in the storm.

myself? I promised myself that I would pray about it the next day.

Early in the morning, when I closed my eyes, the first thing I saw in my mind’s eye was Jesus, clad in a light blue robe, standing silently on a glassy calm sea. He stretched out his hands as if to say, “Come.” Unlike Peter I didn’t feel the invitation to walk on the water. Instead, Jesus seemed to be saying, “Why not come into the calm?” The wind whipped around him, but both he and the sea remained calm.

Why not come into the calm? Why not indeed? It seemed a real invitation. That morning I crafted a letter and canceled many of the events I’d already agreed to attend. I am loath to cancel anything, but the choice was either a life of storms or a life with at least a little more calm. So I was honest: I needed more quiet in my life in order to be a good Jesuit. I wrote my e-mail, took a deep breath, and hit “Send.”

Not everyone can jettison tasks in this way. A new mother or father cannot simply stop getting up in the “fourth watch of the night” to change a squalling infant. A person caring for an elderly parent cannot simply leave. But most of us know that there are some unnecessary things that prevent us from living more contemplatively, extraneous tasks and events and dates and appointments and things that can be thrown overboard. Do you have to make everyone happy by agreeing to every request? Must you say yes to something else you cannot possibly do—on the job, at your children’s school, or in your family? Aren’t there a few things that you can drop overboard?

Can you hear Jesus inviting you to more calm in your stormy life? Even Jesus needed to take time alone to pray. Reading this, you might feel fear. What would it mean for the storms to cease and for you to live more contemplatively? The disciples knew this fear. Even when things grew calm on the Sea of Galilee, when one would think that their fear would lessen, it only grew.

Jesus gently guides us away from fear, and he calls to us, as he did to the disciples, inviting us onto the calm waters of life. He says to us, “Come.”

CC

Life exam

THIS ACADEMIC SEMESTER we've been teaching a course at Yale College titled *Life Worth Living*. Like other observers of contemporary higher education, we have noted that American colleges and universities have let consideration of great questions about the meaning of life fade out of their curricula. If students want to ask these questions, they must do so outside of the classroom. (Some Christian colleges, but not all, may be an exception to this trend.) These developments in higher education echo a movement in American culture at large. We have become increasingly dedicated to and adept at identifying and deploying the *means* to achieve our ends, but we get uncomfortable and disoriented if we are forced to ask about the *ends* of our lives—their goals and meaning. *Life Worth Living* is part of an initiative to revive and strengthen critical discussion about what, for Christians, is the most important question of our lives: What is a life worth living?

Over the course of the semester we are engaging with certain core texts and the lives of key founding figures from six highly influential traditions: Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, utilitarianism, and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. We encourage students to treat these traditions not as objects of mere historical curiosity but as living visions of what makes life worth living. We ask the students to regard these texts as making claims on their lives and then to wrestle with those claims.

We assigned the Gospel of Luke for the class session introducing a Christian vision of a life worth living. The class discussion focused in great part on questions of repentance and forgiveness. (It is always interesting to see what strikes students who have never read the Gospel before.) Are you really supposed to forgive someone over and over again as long as they say, "I repent" (Luke 17:3–4)? Does God really forgive like that? Isn't that just license to sin and sin and repent at the last minute with no consequences? What would it take for repentance to be genuine?

Toward the end of the session we posed a question that we ask for each of the traditions: How would your life have to change if this tradition were right about what makes life worth living? This question always elicits a few seconds of silence. In this case, a student who is not a Christian raised his hand.

We have been talking a lot about repentance, he said. It seemed to him that he would have to take repentance serious-

ly if the Christian vision of what makes life worth living were right. But as he thought about it, he decided that repentance would be supremely difficult. It would require looking at himself, his past and present deeds and attitudes, with clear sight and issuing judgments of condemnation on some, probably many, of them. More than that: it would require really turning away from them. What pain that would cause!

There are modulated echoes here of Nietzsche's aphorism: "I did that" says my memory: "I couldn't have done that"—says my pride, and stands its ground. Finally, memory gives in" (*Beyond Good and Evil*). Perhaps an equally common approach is to say, "I did that, but that is not so bad after all." The student had been educated by his cultural milieu not to focus on weaknesses and mistakes in introspection but to identify and develop his strengths with his eyes firmly fixed on the future. Repentance would require a radically different approach to himself.

His comments raise big questions for Christians today. Christians live in the same culture—one that trains us to look to ourselves and our pasts primarily to identify the strengths that we should develop or promote, to figure out the little things about ourselves that we would like to adjust, to find excuses, or perhaps to seek therapeutic healing. Recognizing, naming, and wrestling with our failings—not just as imperfections or slip-ups but as culpable shortcomings and transgressions or even a misdirection of our whole life—that act is hard to imagine and harder still to practice.

If we are after a life worth living, however, repentance over having led an "unworthy" life or done unworthy things is unavoidable. That's why repentance is a key element of an appropriate response to God's work in Jesus Christ. Mark summarizes Jesus' early preaching: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). In a culture that finds repentance unintelligible, impractical, or unnecessary, we are called to witness to its intelligibility, beauty, and importance. And that witness begins with our own repentance.

Our student was right. Repentance is difficult. It is painful. But the extent of our willingness to take upon ourselves the pain of repentance is a measure of our determination to live a life worth living.

Ryan McAnnally-Linz is an associate at Yale Graduate School. Miroslav Volf teaches theology at Yale Divinity School.

IN Review

Reformed and antimodern

by James Bratt

Some classic works on the origins of modernity gave pride of place to Calvinism. Max Weber famously made it the fount of capitalist economics; Robert K. Merton, that of experimental science; Michael Walzer, of political radicalism. In his new history of Reformed churches, D. G. Hart will have none of it. Rather than shaping modern life, he argues, Calvinism developed in reaction to it—sometimes in the negative sense of the word.

Calvinists have not been power brokers with a plan; instead, they have been ordinary folk who, their predestinating deity notwithstanding, found their way to an authentic ecclesiastical tradition by “accidental” and “unlikely ways.” The tradition has managed to spread from “marginal cities in central Europe” to all parts of the globe, but only by considerable trial and one persistent error—the aspiration to be part of the political or social establishment, to take charge of society, to be the culture formers that Merton and Weber espied. To that temptation only a very few have been immune, and they have remained so by adhering to strictly defined forms of doctrine, liturgy, and, above all, polity. That, in sum, is the author’s point of view.

The narrative unfolds in three phases. In phase 1, from Zurich and Geneva in the 1520s through the end of the 17th century, the fortunes of Reformed Protestantism are closely tied to the good graces of civil magistrates. Where these magistrates are hostile—as in Poland, France, and the Palatinate—a budding Calvinist network is crushed or harshly constricted. Where that network enhances political identity, autonomy, or stability, it gains better headway.

Thus weak but aspiring polities—Switzerland, Scotland, the Netherlands, and various “nooks and crannies” of the Holy Roman Empire—become the long-term strongholds of the Calvinist cause.

In phase 2 the instruments that the churches use to order their houses prove to be divisive or disappointing, and they generate new departures. These instruments are, first, confessional standards, which generate dissent or complaints of dead orthodoxy, and second, structures of governance that become entangled with either doing or defying the state’s bidding. Accordingly, the frontiers of vitality for Calvinism in the 17th and 18th centuries lie in colonial ventures abroad and in the turn toward pietism and “heart religion” at home.

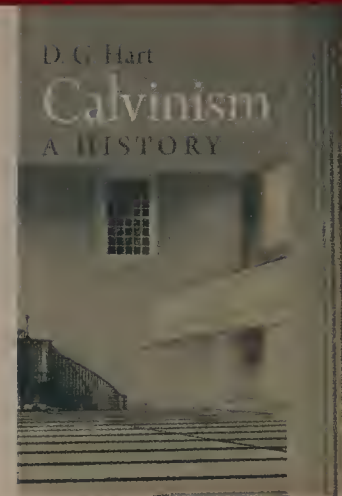
The results are a mixed bag. The New World of Dutch, English, Scottish, and German settlements is distant enough from the home countries to allow some profitable experimentation, but, especially early on, the settlements still lean heavily on local patrons. Evangelical awakenings, by relocating religion from a public square of formalism and compromise to the interior sphere of personal devotion and relationships, quicken spiritual life but at the cost of institutional salience. Not just civil and university authority but doctrinal canons and ecclesiastical assemblies lose sway under revivalist religion, which is a long shot from the ideals of the Reformed founders.

In phase 3, the 19th and 20th centuries, Calvinists have to devise new modes of identity and initiative under the circumstances of state-church separation. This is a traditional move in church history narrative, but Hart gives it

an unusual and revealing turn by focusing on four protest movements: the 1843 Disruption of the Scottish Kirk that produced the Free Church, galvanized by the leadership of Thomas Chalmers; the Dutch Neo-Calvinist project associated with Abraham Kuyper; the fundamentalist uprising in American Presbyterianism led by J. Gresham Machen; and Karl Barth’s work in and beyond the Confessing Church’s defiance of Nazi Germany. On the face of it these four might seem odd bedfellows, but the author’s analysis allows us to see clearly their parallels, distinctions, strengths, limitations, and legacies around the world. Alongside these cases run the mission ventures by which Calvinism, hitched to the wagon of Western imperialism, becomes a worldwide faith.

Hart wraps up the story with a three-fold conclusion: that the Reformed tradition has a place in a new, fourth phase of unfolding global Christianity, despite the greater attention usually paid to Pentecostal and Roman Catholic expressions therein; that this place is one more manifestation of Calvinism’s remarkable adaptability across time and space; and that Presbyterian polity—lay-centered and locally sensitive, yet connective—tops the list of explanations for this outcome.

The great merit of this book is that it pulls so many threads together in a coherent tapestry. The writing is clear and efficient, and readers who object to notes will find that there are just a few tucked away at the back of the book. The



Calvinism: A History

By D. G. Hart

Yale University Press, 352 pp., \$35.00

bibliography supplies a chapter-by-chapter reading list from which we can infer the particular sources—most of them secondary—on which the author relied.

When covering so many eras, places, and institutions, an author will inevitably err on some details. In the chapter treating the domain I know best, the Dutch Neo-Calvinist tradition, I counted four errors of fact and two strained interpretations. But these did not detract from the overall salience of the argument. In short, this is the book you ought to turn to when you need to know the basics about a particular body in the Reformed household, to read a comparative analysis of ecclesiastical cousins and siblings in a given generation, or to find an interesting diagnosis of the family system that makes this clan tick, in quarreling and comity alike.

That said, readers should be aware of the particular interpretations structuring the book's argument. Hart's *Calvinism* is a very old-fashioned work, so old-fashioned as to be newly revealing. In contrast to the contextual analyses of religion that have dominated the professional guild for at least 40 years, Hart stays very much within the official institutions of Reformed Christianity, calling our attention to dynamics and developments that the looser contextual approach can overlook. The cost of this strategy is to ignore the broader connections and interactions that Calvinists made outside of formal church assemblies—in their workweek activities and in their participation in and impact on politics and education.

It is in these latter domains especially that Reformed laity have been overrepresented over the centuries. On the American side, for instance, the Presbyterian John Witherspoon (whom Hart discusses with respect to church matters) taught more participants in the early U.S. political system than any other single individual, and Calvinists founded well over half of the new nation's institutions of higher learning before the Civil War. There's not a word of this in the book. Because it is these broader sociocultural dynamics that the great sages of modernity were exploring in formulating their Calvinist-centric theories, we must con-

clude that Hart has not answered—or even engaged—their arguments in this volume. But he has certainly given impetus for another volume that does just that. It will doubtless conclude that Calvinism's interactions with the modern world have been far more checkered than the grand theorists thought, but that there indeed has been interaction and creative contribution.

Hart not only tries to bottle up a movement in institutions, he also radically restricts the institutions that qualify for consideration. Baptists do not figure in his account at all, and the Reformed currents that continue on in, say, American Congregational and New School Presbyterian churches since the 1837 conflict with Old Schoolers go without mention. This derives from Hart's minimal attention to theology as well as to the whole-life implications of faith. We read about formal statements of doctrine and presumed departures therefrom, but not about the recombination of Calvinist tenets with themes from other traditions or with neglected elements of Calvinism itself. Finally, though the evidence at hand is more than ample, Hart does not explore the splintering effect of the formal creeds he espouses. Strict definition makes for clear ecclesiology but also for a whole lot more ecclesiae to consider. As the Scots Presbyterians especially show, the fight for confessional principle offers fertile ground for the narcissism of small differences.

This book is an antipolitical political history. Political in that it centers on formal institutions of church and state and the relationship between them. Antipolitical in that any concerted venture by believers into the public domain is deemed to entail dreams of reestablishing hegemony in society and to be a threat to the integrity of the church. *Activist* thus becomes a dirty word in these pages. But there are any number of intermediate locations between quietism and establishmentarianism, and one of Calvinism's virtues is that it has explored them. That is a subject for another book.

James Bratt teaches history at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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Invasion of the Dead: Preaching Resurrection

By Brian K. Blount
Westminster John Knox, 156 pp.,
\$16.00 paperback

In this small book originating from his 2011 Beecher Lectures at Yale, Brian Blount mounts a sweeping, lively, beguiling, and convincing plea for recognition of and bold preaching about the God who, in Jesus Christ, invades and routs death, excites the “walking dead” and thus provokes “the dawning of the dead.” Resurrection, Blount argues, transforms all of us “living dead” into witnesses that God has plans for our morbidity and that God will not rest until those plans are fulfilled.

“Dead is a relative term,” says Blount. We are in a time of the “walking dead”: zombies are among us. It’s a grotesque world in which “humans and monsters

often become hard to distinguish.” With genocide, mass murder, school shootings, and, for mainline Christians, the death of our beloved denominations and the diminishment of our churches, death has become “the new normal.”

In this moribund age Blount invites us to embrace the apocalyptic imagery streaming from popular culture. He considers the proliferation of living-dead TV shows and novels an opportunity for Christian preachers to think themselves back into a fresh affirmation of apocalypticism, and he enlists the testimony of Revelation, Paul, and Mark’s Gospel to show that the resurrection of Jesus is the initial and decisive divine act of apocalyptic re-creation and victory.

Blount not only commends apocalyptic, resurrection-induced preaching but asserts that the resurrection is the substance and the whole point of daring Christian witness. Here is “an apocalyptic moment whose revelatory power and promise trumped even Christ’s spectacu-

lar death.” Resurrection begins with the dead and moves to revelation of a God who refuses to leave the dead alone. The cross is our deadly, vicious response to the revolutionary, boundary-breaking love of God in Christ; the resurrection is God’s response to our death-dealing ways. When all is said and done, Paul was right, says Blount. Without resurrection we Christians have nothing to say to a daily dying world.

The opening section, in which Blount boldly affirms the immediate relevance of the Apocalypse, dragon and all, is the most bracing section of the book. At the outset he serves notice that he intends to go against the grain of liberal theology’s century-old squeamishness about apocalypticism. Albert Schweitzer was correct in recognizing Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet but wrong in contending that apocalypticism is incredible to modernity. The best that modern historians can do is to agree that Jesus went to the cross; they are unable, given the limits of

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modern ways of thinking, to accept God's revolutionary determination revealed in the resurrection of Jesus.

Blount has written well on Revelation before. One of his fruitful insights is that the battles and victories of African Americans are the fruit of the apocalyptic mind-set of a church that in the face of death-dealing evil stands up and affirms God's present and future resurrection victory. The African-American church has always remembered that the biblical apocalyptic is a God-given weapon in their struggles and that the bold, visionary apocalyptic preacher is "God's weapon" in the revolution known as the coming kingdom of God. Blount made these connections earlier in his *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation through African American Culture*. In *Invasion of the Dead*, his insights are even more striking and appropriate.

He offers an intriguing reading of Mark that convinced me that it is a Gospel not only of the cross but also of apocalyptic resurrection, made all the more powerful by Mark's starting assumption (rather than description) of resurrection.

Running throughout *Invasion of the Dead* is the assertion that we preachers must preach the resurrection as enthusiastically as we preach the cross—and more often. Having seen much theological mischief worked by our preaching the cross rather than resurrection, Blount mounts an impressive critique of Augustinian/Lutheran theology of the cross. He shows in a few bold strokes how Paul is shattered as much by resurrection as by the cross. Then he goes on to argue that resurrection is the most political, countercultural, defiant word we preachers have to say to a world cowering before seemingly omnipotent death.

This polemic against a theology of the cross is the least convincing aspect of Blount's book. I fear that his critique of cruciform theology is unfair to the deeply apocalyptic nature of the best

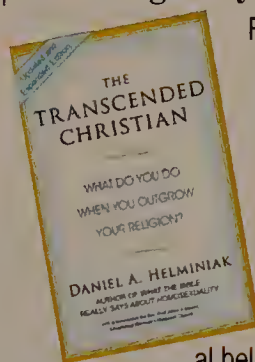
theology of the cross. Cross and resurrection ought to be kept together in any strongly apocalyptic theology. Blount's failure to engage the deeply apocalyptic readings of a theologian of the cross like Martin Luther or John Howard Yoder detracts from his argument against a cruciform overemphasis.

Still, Blount's bold warning to us preachers against embarrassment over or diminishment of the scandal of resurrection and against the defiance of apocalypticism is worth the price of his book. A faithful, clenched-fisted, insubordinate apocalypticism characterizes all preaching worthy of the designation Christian. That's especially clear when Blount relates his critique of accommodationist preaching to the lessons learned in the African-American experience. That segment of the church, I suspect, learned how the theology of the cross can be abused as a tool of dominance where unjust suffering is elevated as a good in itself and the cross is reduced to a remedy for merely personal sin.

A strong, clear word of resurrection-induced, apocalyptic, revolutionary hopefulness is just one of the gifts I received from *Invasion of the Dead*.

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Reviewed by William H. Willimon, professor of the practice of Christian ministry at Duke Divinity School, a United Methodist bishop (retired), and pastor of Duke Memorial United Methodist Church, Durham, North Carolina.



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In Defence of War

By Nigel Biggar

Oxford University Press, 384 pp., \$55.00

Many North American Christians have become skeptical of U.S. military interventions. Since World War II, our nation has engaged in sustained conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq and more briefly fought in the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Libya, and elsewhere. The Pentagon budget now exceeds the combined military expenditures of the next ten nations and supports U.S. forces in more than 150 countries. As Boston University professor Andrew Bacevich has declared, "Washington rules" by its own rules to justify "permanent war."

Nigel Biggar, pastor of moral and pastoral theology at the University of Oxford, counters that Western Christians

have become too skittish, too cynical. They have succumbed to the virus of wishful thinking, willfully ignoring the fact that soldiers and military action, like police officers and law enforcement, are essential to social peace and justice. Military power guarantees what Americans too often take for granted: a high standard of living and civil liberties. War can sometimes help us extend these blessings to peoples who suffer under tyrannous regimes.

Biggar is no militarist. He knows that war inevitably leaves inexpressible loss and sorrow in its wake. He is nevertheless persuaded that war can sometimes be just. Moreover, he believes that U.S. and other Western leaders care deeply about just war principles. If Biggar is right, the Christian tradition has insights that can help them—and all of us—to think more responsibly about war and peace.

Much of *In Defence of War* is directed to specialists, but general readers will find several chapters well worth their effort. Biggar makes his case by appealing to what appears most central to the New Testament and to Christian pacifists: the love of neighbor that Jesus commands and embodies on the cross. This kind of love, says Biggar, may sometimes require us to prosecute war against evil-doers. Compassion for the victims of injustice, not fear or hatred of their vic-

Reviewed by John P. Burgess, professor of systematic theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.



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timizers, can guide war and render it just. To be sure, we must be very cautious; every war is tragic and results in unintended harm. Nevertheless, an unjust peace that protects a murderous regime may be even worse.

Just war is also a matter of Christian concern for those who perpetrate evil. A just war aims to punish the victimizers, not to destroy them (although, says Biggar, their deaths may result “secondarily” or “unintentionally”); its purpose is to open up space in which they come to see the folly of their ways and repent. Holding others accountable for their wrongdoing can be an expression, not a denial, of Christian love.

Biggar carefully examines and orders the key criteria of a just war. In considering going to war (*ius ad bellum*), a nation must attend to questions of just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, last resort, proportionality (ensuring that the costs of war will not outweigh the benefits), and prospect of success. In prosecuting war (*ius in bello*), two additional criteria obtain: proportionality (avoiding excessive force) and discrimination (minimizing casualties among innocents).

Biggar then applies these criteria to three deeply disputed wars of the past hundred years—the First World War, NATO’s intervention in Serbia in 1999, and the U.S.-British invasion of Iraq in 2003. Carefully weighing arguments for and against, he evaluates how well the Allies met each criterion of just war, argues that just cause was of central importance, and concludes that all three wars were just.

Biggar’s chapter on Iraq is especially provocative. Many readers will wonder how he can make a case for a war that they regard as a disastrous fiasco. Biggar demands that we look more carefully at the evidence. Saddam Hussein had killed hundreds of thousands of his own citizens, had launched wars against Iran and Kuwait, and had refused to cooperate with one UN resolution after another. Economic sanctions and no-fly zones had no effect. The West could reasonably expect more of the same. As far as Biggar can see, no alternatives to military force remained if Saddam were to be eliminated as a clear and present danger.

The U.S. is responsible for disastrous mistakes that it made in conducting the war, especially its failure to provide for political stability after its lightning-quick victory, but allowing millions of Iraqis to languish in fear and political oppression would have been a far graver ill. Most Iraqis may not have greeted the American and British invaders as liberators, but whatever the deficiencies of the new government, very few of its people long for the good old days of Saddam Hussein.

Biggar’s arguments are carefully researched and meticulously argued. He analyzes the most important classical and contemporary theological and philosophical literature, and he draws insights from novels, movies, diaries, interviews and personal visits to war memorials. His case for just war is deeply heartfelt. Even readers who remain unconvinced will value his book for challenging them to think more clearly about war and peace.

BookMarks

Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich


Edited by Dean G. Stroud
Eerdmans, 215 pp., \$20.00 paperback

In the Hitler era, a small number of German pastors associated with the Confessing Church dared to speak against Nazi rule. Some lost their lives for doing so. This collection includes sermons by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller, Rudolf Bultmann, Helmut Gollwitzer and lesser-known pastors. Stroud, professor emeritus of German studies at the University of Wisconsin in LaCrosse, describes the political situation and the prevailing religious attitudes that these pastors courageously engaged. The sermons show the power of good theology, biblical exposition, and practical application.

The Gospel of God’s Reign: Living for the Kingdom of God

By Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt
Cascade Books, 158 pp., \$18.00 paperback

Johann Christoph Blumhardt and Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt, father and son, would be obscure German Lutheran pastors if Karl Barth hadn’t been influenced by them. An emphasis on the kingdom of God being present and active in our own times and their acclamation that “Jesus is the victor” distinguished their theology. While the elder Blumhardt applied this conviction to the healing of mind and body, Christoph saw that his father’s kingdom theology had social implications. He eventually joined the socialists, although in time he became disillusioned with politics. This is the second in a new series, which will make more of their work available in English. The content in this book consists of short, theological musings organized around themes like God’s love, the reign of God, and the living Christ. Pastors will find these musings useful in their own reflections and sermon preparations.



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ON Media

Cop car philosophizing

In the last few years, HBO has developed something of a specialty in TV shows set in a decaying southern landscape. Louisiana is the state of choice to represent a land of rich history, myth, and decadence. *True Blood* was the first to tap this vein with its campy vampire allegory, followed by the more realistic post-Katrina *Treme*, and now the haunting crime drama *True Detective*.

True Detective flaunts the southern gothic motif every chance it gets. The story is populated with dilapidated houses, long-abandoned churches, tent revivals, huckster preachers, corrupt politicians, and a populace hiding dark secrets. There is a crumbling plantation-style house so cluttered with the moldering relics of family history that William Faulkner would probably roll his eyes.

The show revolves around the relationship between two ill-matched detectives working on the case of their careers: the ritualized and sexualized murder of a woman in a small bayou

parish. The detectives are Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey, displaying in riveting fashion his transformation from rom-com pretty boy to serious actor) and Marty Hart (Woody Harrelson). Given the setting, the murder seems highly predictable, tinged with hints of cultish fetishism, misogyny, and misplaced religious enthusiasm. The show elevates the story, however, with surprising narrative techniques and breathtaking cinematography.

The narrative moves between the original investigation of the murder in 1995 and the present. Cohle and Hart are interrogated by two other detectives who are working on a current case that may have links to the 1995 murder. Splitting the narrative this way suggests a more layered mystery. The fact that the contemporary detectives are poring over every detail of the older case suggests that the case was not really put to rest. There are hints of a more pervasive and pernicious evil at work in rural Louisiana.

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LAYERED MYSTERY: *Detectives Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) and Marty Hart (Woody Harrelson) investigate murder and argue the meaning of life.*

Despite these hints, the narrative doesn't go deeper than an episode of *Law and Order: SVU*. We don't learn much about why the violence was perpetrated. The victims are just helpless bodies to whom horrible things were done, not fully fleshed people for whom we might come to care. All the hints of supernatural evil and conspiratorial plots are not really about something bigger, but about something more intimate: the relationship between Hart and Cohle.

Their names insinuate an allegorical relationship. Hart is a well-meaning good ol' boy: a smart detective who thinks with his gut, but who is not prone to pry too closely into his own middle-class existence. Cohle, on the other hand, insists that the world is as worn out and blackened as his name suggests. Prone to existential introspection, he espouses a philosophy of reductive nihilism. One of these monologues so perfectly captures the seeming bravado of "seeing the world as it really is"—set against the backdrop of a tent revival—that I plan to use it with my freshmen classes when I teach about how some popularized theories of religion regard it as folderol for the weak.

This "heart vs. head" or "naïf vs. pessimist" motif starts to break down halfway through the season when it's evident that Hart's optimistic embrace of life masks seeds of the same misogyny that afflicts the men he is hunting. And

Cohle's nihilism, it turns out, covers a bottomless well of love and longing suppressed because of personal tragedy. By the final episode (fittingly titled "Form and Void"), it's clear that the car-ride chatter between Hart and Cohle about whether there is really meaning in the world is the essence of the show. The ritualized killing of women and children was just an object to start their debate.

All of this would be fine if the show weren't trying to wear a mantle of superiority. In form and style, the show ranks with the best in TV's renaissance era, and it showcases some of the best acting on television in recent memory. McConaughey and Harrelson breathe such fierce, pulsing life into Cohle and Hart that they are magnetic and unforgettable characters. But the existential heft of the show never exceeds the palaver of a freshmen philosophy class.

If *True Detective* is renewed for a second season—and given its overwhelming popularity, one assumes it will be—it will come back with a whole new cast, new detectives, and a new story. The filmmaking and acting were so good the first time round, I'm sure I'll tune in. But let's hope the writers take a few advanced courses in the liberal arts before they start writing dialogue.

The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University.

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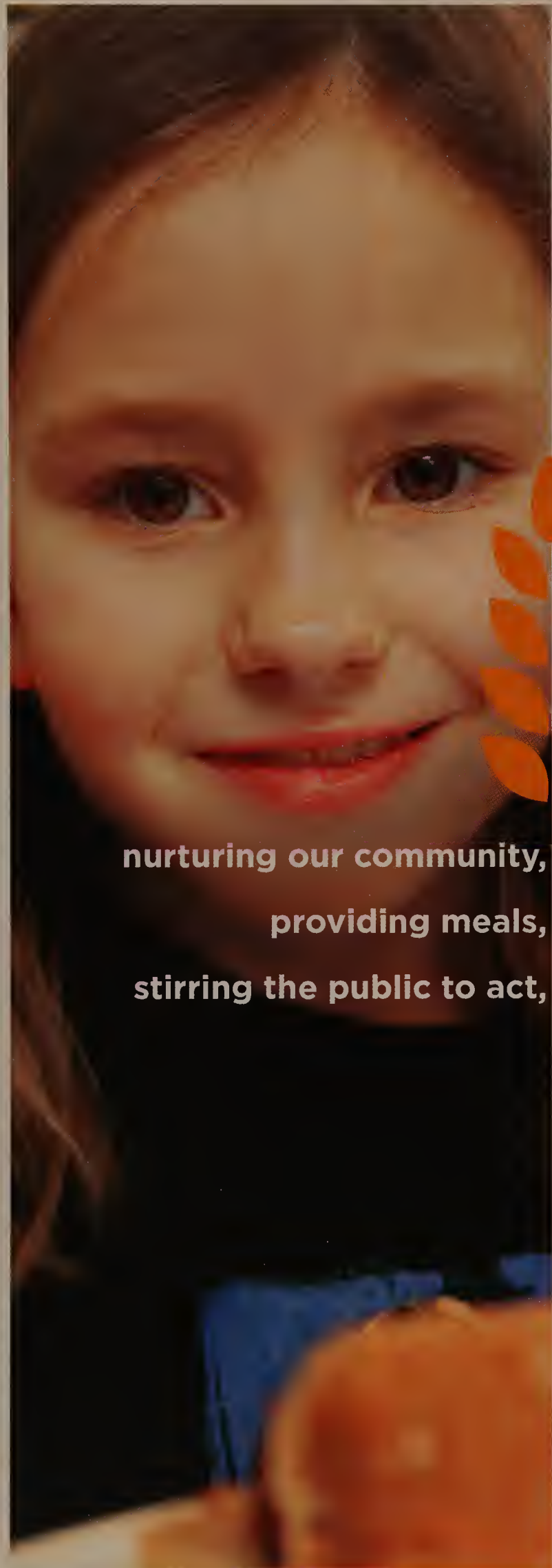


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by Philip Jenkins

notes from the GLOBAL CHURCH

When I lecture on global Christianity, I am sometimes asked whether, in retrospect, I would revise what I wrote many years ago in books like *The Next Christendom*. Usually my answer is no.

But in one critical area conditions are changing so quickly as to demand rethinking. Whereas I (and others) once presented Africa as a region of extreme poverty and deprivation, we now have to take account of economic development that in some regions is so rapid as to amount to a boom. We can only begin to outline the religious consequences.

At the turn of this century, sub-Saharan Africa was an economic nightmare. During the 1990s, the region managed annual GDP growth of only 2.2 percent—dreadful for such a poor region—while inflation ran at 27 percent. The AIDS epidemic was out of control, and much of central Africa was embroiled in the mass slaughter of the Congo wars. Civil conflicts threatened to ignite elsewhere, above all in Nigeria. News stories from Africa customarily focused on ruthless militias, child soldiers, blood diamonds, and mass rape. So hopeless did conditions appear that scholars invented the category of the Fourth World to describe a region that could not even keep up with the Third. African religion, it seemed, had to be

understood as an attempt to seek in the spiritual realm some ray of hope that was so conspicuously lacking in the material world.

At first sight, the African world of 2014 does not look very different. South Sudan, Mali, and the Central African Republic remain bywords for ethnic violence and mass destruction, while terrorism, corruption, and dictatorial regimes all flourish. Even in peaceful regions, stable and honest government is a distant dream. Wise city-dwellers know better than to count on power supplies being regularly available, and they constantly face the hazard of violent crime.

Yet amid the familiar narratives of misery and violence are startling signs of growth and prosperity. Partly, this is a consequence of insatiable global demand (headed by the Chinese) for minerals and natural resources. But services and manufacturing are also growing. To quote the *Economist*'s John O'Sullivan: "In the past decade, only the bloc of developing Asian economies, led by China, has grown faster than Africa. . . . Four of the world's six fastest-growing economies in 2014 will be in sub-Saharan Africa."

Despite its endemic problems with religious conflict, Nigeria is doing very well and will soon be the continent's

largest economy. Suddenly, Ethiopia's economy is a model to be envied. Daring investors now see rich opportunities throughout the region. Yes, progress is patchy and uneven, but compared to conditions in 2000, Africa is radically different. These changes have broad social consequences, not least in terms of bolstering middle-class and upper-middle-class groups. Ideally, those groups—being literate and globally minded—should increasingly press for better government and public services.

What will be the impact of these transformations on African Christianity? Let me begin by saying what the effects will not be. We will not see millions of Africans deciding overnight that now that they have plenty of consumer goods they no longer need the consolations of religion, Christian or otherwise. That did not happen in Asian Tigers like South Korea, and it won't in the new African Lions. A lot of the new disposable income will be invested in churches.

The main impact on Christian churches will likely fall into the category of "more of the same." For some years now, older independent churches have faded in the face of competition from new

denominations rooted in global Pentecostalism that emphasize the blessings of material prosperity. Some tailor their message to aspiring professional and entrepreneurial groups, which will become much more numerous in the coming decade. Charismatic megachurches should boom.

Prosperity teachings never lack for critics. Nevertheless, such teachings usually include important practical lessons for coping with the new globalized world—lessons, for example, in the responsible use of debt and credit. Latin American precedents suggest that these churches also provide a vital organizational focus for campaigns for social and political reform and civic improvement. Expect more, rather than less, religious politics.

Other likely effects lie in the longer term. Increasingly, the demand for labor should draw more women into full-time paid employment, particularly in emerging service sectors. Expect to see more Western-style debates over issues of gender and sexuality, although framed strictly in terms of African traditions. What a pleasure it would be to see Africa's churches enduring some of the familiar discontents of prosperity.

Philip Jenkins recently wrote The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade.

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Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor in Boston.

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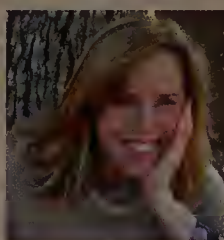
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The Rev. **Lillian Daniel** is the author of the 2013 book *When Spiritual But Not Religious Is Not Enough: Seeing God in Surprising Places, Even the Church*. She has served as the senior minister of the First Congregational Church, Glen Ellyn, Illinois, since 2004.



The Rev. **Martin B. Copenhaver** is author of the 2013 book *Living Faith while Holding Doubts*. He has been senior pastor of Wellesley Congregational Church in Massachusetts since 1994 and has been named president-elect of Andover Newton Theological School.

Daniel and Copenhaver coauthored *This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers*.

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